

*EGYPTIAN
LOVE*

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BY
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have spelled Fijian words as they are written. In the Fijian language all B's are preceded by an imaginary M. Lakeba is pronounced Lakemba. D's have N before them and Q is pronounced NG. There being no need for the hard C as well as the K, the missionaries, who designed the Fijian alphabet, decided to use C for the TH sound. The vowels are pronounced like Italian or French vowels, not like the English.

—S. H.

EGYPTIAN LOVE



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CHAPTER I

ABUS and I were leaning over the rail at the stern end of the ship. We were both steerage passengers, lost to the world among nine hundred emigrants who were abandoning England for Australia. It was in the days before the war when every outbound ship was carrying a like number of England's best artisans to seek their fortunes in a land which, they hoped, would offer them better prospects of making a living than at home. We had become acquainted on board and, as I joined the ship at Naples, had known one another slightly for about a fortnight.

It had been a remarkable fortnight for me in many ways but I had found my interest in the varied experiences of the steerage narrowing down to my attraction to the girl at my side who was so remote and inaccessible, and for whom at the same time I sensed an intimate feeling which I could not explain to myself. Looking backward across the time which was then before us, it seems astonishing to me that we did not recog-

nize each other sooner and yet, humanly speaking, it is not surprising that we were somewhat long in getting acquainted, for we were about as far removed from one another as it is possible to imagine.

Abus was a Welsh peasant girl from Maesteg, a tiny village in the mountains somewhere, who had almost no knowledge of anything beyond what she would naturally have acquired among such surroundings while I, Joseph Pyecote, was at three-and-twenty a somewhat mature product of English public-school and university training. I had an exceedingly good opinion of myself and was a good deal of a prig. I had recently taken a respectable first in the History Tripos at Cambridge, which I regarded as the hub of the universe; I had played football and tennis for Peterhouse, my tiny but excellent college; had been tried, in my third year, for the University team at soccer, and taken one or two minor University prizes; done very creditably, on the whole. I had, I say, a very good opinion of myself and had never had any reason to think otherwise, though I had a veneer of conventional modesty for everyday use. I was an only son and a considerably spoilt and petted darling. My parents were somewhat prominent in the county (we live in Kent) and very well off.

I had a private income of my own, inherited from my grandmother, which, together with a personable body, had been a good deal admired by a number of girls and their mothers for some years. I was at the stage when almost any girl would do and every girl was fair game, a game to which I devoted myself assiduously when not otherwise actively employed. But, catholic as were my tastes in women, there was not much to choose from in the steerage of the R. M. S. *Orama*, and the study of my fellow man, for which I had conceived the notion of travelling in the steerage to Australia, had already begun to pall.

Both I and my chum, Robert A. Ellicot of Emmanuel, had a nebulous idea of a literary future, but we had been sufficiently unsettled by three happy years at Cambridge not to want to apply ourselves to business or to begin any kind of routine work in a hurry. We told ourselves that we needed the experience which a tour round the world would give us, and we were determined to see as much of the world as we could in the time before we settled down to anything. Why not, since we were both independent? The idea of travelling steerage appealed to both of us instantaneously and we had started off within a fortnight from the memorable evening

when the idea occurred to me, and with little more preparation than if we had meant to spend a week-end in Paris.

At most times the small deck space reserved for steerage passengers was littered with humanity. Whoever had been able to procure a camp-chair was occupying it proudly or hoping that the owner would not suddenly appear to claim it. Those for whom there were no seats leaned heavily on the gunwale or disposed themselves to sleep as long as possible by the simple expedient of tilting their caps over their unshaven faces, most of which were now peeling with sunburn. The promenade was a medley of orange peel and cracker boxes, broken food and crushed chocolate cream. Wrappers of this chased covers of that whenever the wind blew downward; there were dozens of shapeless mothers attendant upon loud-voiced bundles, and children innumerable massaging their grubby pink cheeks with bread and jam. I can still see that vision of caps and billycock hats, collarless shirts, waistcoats parted in the middle revealing gray flannel or loud-striped shirts a fortnight gone, baskets of sewing, cards, bird cages, dogs, . . . and an occasional able-bodied seaman picking his by-your-leavesome way through all the human débris, steerage

. . . among which were many "assisted emigrants"; all poor, some very, very poor, but by no means bad material, for Australia will not accept rubbish. Just now all the decks were empty and as clean as early morning decks: all the passengers were ashore, but Abus had been required to bring her small nephew back to the ship in a hurry for some reason and, having time to burn, I was amusing myself with glimpses into her simple history.

Fortunately for me, Ellicot could not abide red-haired women, so he did not envy me Abus, who was the only girl on board who made any appeal to me. Moreover, he was fully occupied with a little Italian baggage whom he picked up after we passed Taranto. After our first twenty-four hours together I found myself left alone rather more than I had anticipated. Ellicot always had a sneaking admiration for Abus, in spite of her hair, on account of her intensely capable, practical way with her brother's children, whom she mothered amazingly well. I learned that it was she who managed the family exchequer and that her huge brother deferred to her judgment in everything. He had lost his wife three months ago and was utterly helpless without her. I gathered that Abus had always managed the entire household

in Maesteg; an eminently practical and capable little woman. Apparently it was a job which had taken all of her time and energy, as she had had to do most of the work of a large household consisting of several brothers, not to mention a bed-ridden mother who had at last succumbed to consumption after seven years' illness.

Abus had been married for a little over a year to a horrible-looking man whom I later saw once only, when he met her on the dock at Sydney. Her husband had preceded her a few months in advance to prepare a place for her and she was now on her way to rejoin him. All of which seemed rather an advantage to me at first, because I told myself that nothing serious could possibly happen to me in connection with a wild female peasant from Wales, but I soon began to feel a degree of interest in her out of all proportion to my intention; a real pity for her as I learned about the life she led with him; and a still more real loathing for him. The more she extolled his merits, the more I despised him.

Abus was not exactly pretty but she was a great deal more. She was about five feet three, very frail and slender, straight, and at first glance flat . . . everywhere. Her amazing hair was piled in coils upon her little head, a mass of red gold which always reminded me of

the capital of a slender Greek column. It was strangely sculptural. Her skin was a glittering white and red, and her mouth was a flaming poinsettia scarlet in which I might well have been pardoned for not believing. It was a flower, the like of which never bloomed on mortal woman, dimpled at the corners in a way that gave a hint of a smile when in repose. She looked painted and artificial, especially in the extreme simplicity of her home-made clothing: her colouring looked far more out of place than if she had been accoutred in the flaming garments which I thought should have accompanied it. Like a jewel in a cardboard box, she could not look her best in that environment.

When I saw her later, robed in fine silk and the setting of good quality, the effect was quite different. Of course I did not doubt that her complexion was unreal, but that was not the only mistake I made about her. Abus had never used any kind of cosmetic but kitchen soap in her life, and, as such, her skin was a gleaming miracle. Her eyes were gray and almond-shaped, utterly unlike European eyes but not at all Mongolian, either: I could not place them at all. Her hands, also, I must mention. They were the most exquisite I ever saw, modelled with infinite delicacy and well cared for in spite

of the fact that they were roughened by washing clothes and that her forefinger was pricked by many a needle.

Her husband was half Welsh, half Mexican, and I believe some sort of engineer. His small savage head reminded one of *Homo Neanderthalensis* much more than *Homo Sapiens*; it was sunk in neck muscles which melted into his massive shoulders without interval. He had unusually long arms and Abus said he could twist a shilling into a "butterfly" with his fingers. She spoke of him with obvious respect, and it was very clear to me that she was more than a little afraid of him. I accused her of it one day, point blank, and asked her why she had married him.

"Oh, I dared not refuse," was her answer. "He would have killed me and he would have killed anybody who tried to stop him. He is not very tall, but no man alive could stand against him . . . and he loves me dearly: he is my husband."

Almost whenever she spoke of him, she would end with that staccato, frightened ejaculation, "He is my husband!" as if she were trying to reassure herself or get some comfort from it. It was a long time before I understood why.

"But if you didn't want to marry him, why

didn't you get your brothers to help you; they must be big and strong if they are like the brother you have on board?"

She shut her lips, being shy to admit the truth, namely, that her brothers were just as afraid of him as she was. "He is a good husband to me," she said quickly, "he loves me dearly and would not harm me for the world. That is how he is." And she smiled sadly.

When Abus smiled she ought to have shown two rows of the prettiest teeth in the world, but she showed them very little, perhaps because she tried to hide the fact that she had broken a front tooth which had been very badly repaired.

For some time I bore my curiosity on that point with heroic fortitude, but now that we were alone, I asked her how it had happened.

"My husband did it on the first night . . . I mean, the day we were married."

"Do you mean to say that he struck you?" I asked, the blood surging up into my head with rage and indignation at the thought.

"Oh, no," she replied quickly, "he would never raise his hand against me, he loves me dearly; he cried bitterly when he saw what he had done. It was an accident."

"But how on earth . . . ?"

Abus hung her head like a shy child. She

had no art to refuse to answer a direct question when it was put to her, but she was silent now. I compelled her by pure will power to tell me.

"He is a very passionate man . . . I think," she said, blushing. "He did it when he kissed me. It was not his fault . . . he . . . he is my husband."

There had been no tender love-making for this frail, gentle creature, misplanted by nature among peasants on bleak Welsh hills. She had grown up in some astonishing way, looking as delicate as a hairbell but with the strength and practical value of a cabbage! She had been seen by this grotesque monster with all his rough elemental passions and seized, as a prize, taken from the bosom of her helpless family, not even by conquest, but by fear of his violence. He would have killed anybody who tried to stop him. It had not pleased him to take her away from her family at first: he decided to live with them for awhile after her mother died.

The old woman had been utterly helpless, of course; she trembled when she heard Allister Dunbagh's footfall in the house. She had begged Abus not to marry him, but he was not a man who could take no for an answer about anything. He rode roughshod over all their objections, and her mother died on the day the

engagement was announced. "Marriage or your life!" he offered as alternatives, and as she had seen the effect of thwarting him in little matters she gave in to the inevitable, to the intense relief of her relations and neighbours when he signified his intention of marrying her. On the whole, he was a good match, from their point of view; he had money saved, was a competent man who could always obtain employment, and that he could look after her was patent to the meanest observer. No man could stand against him. That was the unchallenged opinion of them all.

There is no doubt also that he was genuinely fond of her. The incident of the broken tooth on his marriage night sobered him up considerably: "He cried bitterly when he saw what he had done," and awoke too late to the realization that a woman must not be handled in exactly the same way as a sack of coals. He had not had much experience with women, being as religious and strict as he was violent. He was devoted to her, in his fashion, and had been most attentive until her child was still-born. For months she had been terribly ill and had only recently recovered sufficient strength to undertake the journey when I met her on the *Orama*.

She admitted that she had longed to die many

times during that time, and I do not doubt she meant it. And now, every day was bringing her nearer to him, to a new life differing only in kind from the old one, far from her childhood friends, a life which she could only dimly visualize but which she hoped would not be quite so hard as the one she had endured for the last few years. She was very hopeful about it, more so than I could find it in my heart to be. "It will be easier, ah, so much easier, nothing at all . . . I shall only have to cook and wash for one man. At home there were six with my brothers, and before my mother died, seven. That was too much. Since, since I was ill I have not been able to work so hard, but my husband is very good to me, he loves me dearly, and . . ."

"And you do not love him, Abus, and never loved him, and could never love anybody who was not gentle as well as what you are pleased to call 'kind.' "

"And you must not say such things to me, Mr. Pyecote, for I shall not be able to speak with you in future. I love my husband because he is my husband. Do you not see?"

Abus had the strangest turns of speech, which in her mouth seemed to have a special meaning other than the actual meaning in common par-

lance. Her pronunciation of English was quite foreign and fascinating. Most of her *a*'s were long, and yet they were shortened at times into the sound of *u* in butter. She was more fluent in Welsh, of course, which is not one of my accomplishments, and I often had as much difficulty to understand what she said when it was something unexpected as she had to express it. She had learned English at school but had never had much occasion to use it.

I saw little enough of Ellicot in these days except in the early mornings. He was one of nine in my cabin and had the bunk next to mine. I had very little satisfaction in his company when I did see him; we had very little conversation of any interest, for he seemed only anxious to know "how far I had got" with my Welsh friend and was so eager to discuss the progress of his own amour that he did not notice that I had very little to tell and was daily less inclined to tell him anything. The strange little body of Abus intrigued me and I divined gradually that she was not really as thin and shapeless as she at first appeared. She was infinitely delicately modelled and I could think of nothing in art or nature that resembled her but certain tanagras and some little Egyptian figures in a museum at Turin. She intrigued me, and though I never

thought seriously of loving her—any more, that is, than lots of other young women I had loved at various times—I did feel compelled to attend her.

When I came on board I felt complacently sure that there were not many girls who liked me at all that I could not kiss on short notice. Besides, Abus, in my conceited estimation, was not a “lady,” but she was a lot less easy to kiss than many “ladies” I have encountered. She would sit and talk to me until 9:30 P.M., when, according to the regulations of that moral ship, ladies were required to repair to their cabins. Of course I realized that a few shillings, wisely distributed, would obtain special privileges as far as the bo’sun and his satellites were concerned, but when Ellicot asked me “how far I had got,” I felt abashed and tongue-tied, I had nothing truthful to tell him that he would believe, so I lied . . . a little.

She was married and was utterly confident that no man would dream of making love to her. We talked about her village life, of village love, and of morals, on a higher plane than was altogether palatable. When I was with her, I didn’t want to “make love” to her, either: I wanted to make love to her less every day, in spite of the fact that her marvellous mouth was

a continual temptation to me. It was unattainable by any but cave-man methods and I could not bear to be included, in her mind, in the same category with her abominable husband. But she was a new experience to me: she drew out of me sympathy and philosophical discussion such as I had never attempted before with anything feminine. It was when I was away from her that I had hours of desiring her bitterly.

In discussion our points of view were so utterly different on most questions and her mind so quick and alert to seize and weigh every new idea that I offered her, that it became a keen delight to tell her things—teach her, in fact. It also amused me to exercise my own wits in attempting to give her several contrary impressions of my own views and of myself. At times I appeared loose and immoral in her eyes, for she actually was as simple as those who live in the remote country are supposed to be. She was about twenty-four at this time and had never seen anything outside her own primitive village life. She had read almost nothing, having been too busy to read anything since she left school at the age of fourteen. She had not seen more than a dozen magazines in her life and she knew the newspaper chiefly as a means of starting the kitchen fire.

It is incredible to think of how little she knew compared with most people of her class in England. I delighted in teasing and confusing her mind for the purpose of seeing how far she was following me in what I was trying to teach her. In this way we discussed all sorts of things which I thought would interest her, or that she ought to know. I became so interested that I forgot to hold her hand and make the usual little advances of which I considered myself a past master. Once I slid my hand across her knee to take her hand . . . and she grasped it warmly and frankly, without a shadow of embarrassment. "I think," she said, "you are very kind to me because I am a country girl and know nothing at all. I mean to try to learn all you tell me, because I think you are a good man."

My erudition in the arts of love knew no subtle counter to that. I felt the dye of shame soaking through the coating of pleasure her soft little hand spread through me. I did not try that again.

It was altogether a ridiculous situation. Everything told me that here was a perfectly good little girl to flirt with, who had everything to recommend her and no drawbacks at all. She was well out of the nursery, married, but not happily married. She had told me enough to

know that she was bound to him by no better claim than fear; besides, she would come to no serious harm by such an interlude as I pictured to myself so vividly . . . when I was alone. By my standards I had every right to play with her, but when I was with her my right, I found, was radically qualified by the obvious fact that she was not for men or for any other man.

She behaved like a great lady of assured position. How can I describe that baffling manner? It is not to be expressed in words. She seemed to be protected from every advance in some inscrutable way. It seemed sometimes almost as if she were not alone, as if there were something else at times, almost somebody else beside her, who was only waiting for a glance of her eye to take me by the back of my little neck and fling me over the side of the ship into the sea. At times this imminence of physical violence was extraordinarily strong . . . I could feel it in the air around her, and I am not the sort of person who feels things in the air, as a rule. She had the kind of assurance which, I imagine, a queen might have; a consciousness that there is no superior who can command her above her will, though there may be many of superior intelligence.

I felt continually what a perfect little play-

mate she would be if only I could tempt her into my lap, but I couldn't tempt her and I knew it. The most humiliating part of it was that she didn't seem to know I was trying: I who was so experienced and so irresistible! She was as one who is conscious of complete security in protection, but utterly unconscious of any immediate use for it. I gave up trying to make love to her after a little while but I couldn't let her alone. She fascinated me and it was utterly useless for me to tell myself that she was not perfect and that I didn't care. I did care. At the slightest sign of light in her eye I could have burst into flame, but the sign was never there. A sincere regard perhaps, but nothing that could be taken as an encouraging beginning for anything more. My mental attainments she did, at least, admire, and I decided to make the most of them: it was my best chance also. I knew she was interested in me and if she succeeded in keeping me guessing about the state of her passions, I could keep her confused about my morals and sincerity, and I did.

Ellicot had gone ashore with his Italian girl at Columbo: they were so late in coming back to the ship that they were nearly left behind. I tried hard to get Abus to accompany me to Mt. Lavinia Hotel, some miles out of the city, where I

had intended to picnic by myself watching the mud turtles and basking in the sunshine. It is the best possible setting for a flirtation with the right companion, but as I said, Abus wouldn't go. She spent the greater part of the day dragging her steps after her brother and his children, up and down the hot bazaars. I think she was glad of an excuse to get back to the ship early.

We were looking down into the slimy green water between the ship and the dock from the already great altitude of the first deck. I could feel that Abus was pleased to find me alone on board, pleased to be able to talk to me in peace without the surging crowds of babies and their progenitors almost breathing into our faces as they did when the ship was at sea. I had shocked her terribly by appearing to have no more than a slender regard for the bonds of holy matrimony, and she reproved me severely. She was very sure of herself on familiar ground like that, while she deferred to my judgment on everything else. I explained myself by claiming a higher standard of morals than the conventional code, a position she perceived, nebulously, as possible since she had herself found the conventional attitude of the village mind at variance with what she believed was the truth in certain matters.

She was silent awhile. Then she said, using my Christian name for the first time: "Mr. Joseph, you see the water down there, how it moves. Sometimes as you look it is all white and in a moment the dark green of the shadow flows in and makes all dark, so dark, it is almost black. Yet in a moment comes the light and it is all light again."

She sighed. "I cannot tell in English just what I would say, but . . . like that you are!"





CHAPTER II

ELLICOT was one of the most fascinating men I ever met; utterly pagan at heart but with a strong vein of superstition which turned suddenly to religious orthodoxy a few years after our escapade round the world. I understood that he stood strongly for a celibate clergy, but he married six months after he was ordained; I suppose that was his wife's doing. He was not very serious about it all in the beginning but he was already a different man at this time from the one I knew.

I was not in England at the time he was ordained but I heard about it from a mutual friend. He even forgot when the Bishop's examination was going to be held and realized two days in advance of it that he had read none of the things which would be required of him. Half the first day he devoted to procuring the books he ought to have studied for months, the second half of the day and the night following it he skimmed through the books cutting out, with a pair of nail scissors, any remarkable sounding sentences which struck his fancy. He

compiled about two hundred of these which he had reduced to fifty to be typewritten in the morning. The next day he devoted to the Bible, trusting a good deal to luck on the Hebrew which he had studied for a little while in his early days at Cambridge.

His faculty of learning by heart stood him in good stead and he learned his "fifty facts," as he called them, from the text books, Waterfield, "On the Eucharist," and I don't know what besides. The tale was so full of Ellicotisms as it was told to me that I could see him through every move. "I wrote out all the truck I knew by heart before every paper," he said, "and then looked through the paper to see how much of it I could use up. After each exam I crossed off what I had used and retyped the rest which I learned before the next paper. I managed to use them all up but three in the end, and it created an excellent impression." Not many applicants for ordination could quote their text books almost verbatim as he did, and of course the Greek Testament was a toy for him. "It was a fraud," said our mutual friend, "but it was the fraud of a first-class man."

And that about describes it. I often hunger for the Ellicot of the past, with his wit and his light touch that could make his marvellous eru-

dition into a fairyland for children at a moment's notice. I see him occasionally in London now. He came through the war uninjured but he is a changed man whom, for all I know about him now, I might never have known better than a thousand with whom I have been on nodding terms. I feel before him as Abraham must have felt before his sons. I feel that my sight must be failing and I do not know whether to bless or curse. I generally curse, though not in his presence: it would grieve him deeply now. The arms are the arms of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob.

Poor old Ellicot, he's a lot more Jacob than Esau: I liked him better before the reformation. I can hardly imagine the fact that he is now a full-blown High Church Anglican clergyman in a London living, most correct, beloved of his flock, eloquent, distinguished, and already earmarked for a bishopric. A dreadful end, to my thinking, for a man and a great classical scholar who could have had anything in Cambridge if he had been willing to remain and accept a fellowship. The classics were a passion with him and his knowledge of the more obscure and obscure Greek poets was astonishing: Menander and Meleager seemed to have written epigrams especially for him to quote, and it was said of

him that, since Porson's time, nobody could use a great quotation so wittily as the now Reverend Robert Aethelred Ellicot, D.D.

How he found time for so many love affairs at Cambridge I have never been able to understand. When I tackled him with it, he laughed and said, "Girls are always late, I read for my tripos while I'm waiting. And of course, sometimes they don't come at all. I keep a book in my pocket." He was the despair of the dons at Emmanuel. The secret service, which enables the authorities to keep an eye on any undergraduate, brought in enough evidence to hang Ellicot every week, but his tutor, a deeply religious man, must have smothered his conscience against violent action because he knew, what everybody else in Cambridge knew, that "Ethel" Ellicot could be senior classic if he chose and could not be outside the first four whatever he did. The college needed him, expected to make him a Fellow, and his regrettable morals were passed over in the interests of scholarship.

But Ellicot was not all loose: his mind was the finest, clean-cutting machine I ever knew. His conversation was by no means always about women and things "awfully improper"; he was a joy to listen to on almost any subject and he could quote poetry by the page from any author

he knew at all well. If there is one thing I detest, it is to hear poetry quoted in everyday conversation by anybody else, but Ellicot knew that his own gift made him fascinating to listen to. Often, while discussing ordinary matters of no importance, a word would remind him of its use in some other connection and he would begin, in his low, velvet voice, to speak Shelley, Keats, or Rossetti as if the words were his own thoughts materializing for the first time. And after awhile, maliciously, when he saw that his music of word and rhythm had touched deep emotion in me or another, perhaps against our will, he would stop suddenly and say:

“Sorry, old man, I know you don’t care for poetry!” And nothing on God’s earth would induce him to continue.

It is a privilege to have known Ellicot well, and if he took much from women, he gave abundantly also. To have been able to hold him for a while when he was passionately in love must have been an experience few women could ever forget or regret. “They’re happy while it lasts,” he would say, “and I’m happy—and nothing lasts forever. Perhaps it isn’t worse to make twenty women divinely happy for a month than to make one woman miserable all her life!”

I feared for the result of him on the Italian girl who was madly in love with him from the beginning, but he only laughed when I talked to him about it.

"She's all right," he observed lightly, "she's no novice, or I should have let well alone. Besides, if you make women fall in love with you, you must be able to make them fall out of love with you, too. You don't read your Ovid: he tells you all about it in the *Remedia Amoris*. That's part of the game. There won't be any suicide. Don't worry, I know what I'm doing."

"It'll be beastly unpleasant if there is a row on board with all that Italian bunch."

"Don't worry, I tell you, they think she's got a wave of religion. There's a padre in the second class, but he doesn't really occupy my cabin up there. I've squared the Purser."

It seems odd to think of him now—on the high road to a bishopric!

"But, since you are so solicitous for my welfare, permit me to give you a word of warning back. If there is any suicide, it'll be your girl. She's no type to play with. I don't know how far you have got, but look at the way she handles those kids. She's a woman who can't play. She's dead in earnest and if she falls in love with

you—'*prends garde à toi!*' Most red-reads are up and coming, but she, I imagine, would be as slow as an ice-wagon. Go easy when you try to boil your little kettle over Vesuvius . . . she's no portable, canned-heat contraption. And, talking of boiling kettles reminds me of tea; and talking of tea reminds me of Queen Tii of Egypt: do you happen to know that wonderful head of hers, colossal size, in the British Museum? No? She's rather like it, your Abus . . . I thought of it the other day when I saw you talking to her over by the laundry. Still, you don't mind my mentioning it, do you? *Festina lente*, you know, make haste . . . slowly, is a good motto for any young man far from home and mother. Ta toodle, old man; Beppina has an appointment with her priest at seven-thirty. I'll just fade away from these luxurious surroundings to the second class in case I may be of some assistance to her. Ta, toodle!" And he was gone.

I had a good long think about Ellicot's warning and decided in my mind that he was right. Abus was no toy to play with. Beppina was an ordinary Italian peasant from Anticoli, near Rome, where she had posed as a model, for the artist colony there, since she was a little child. She was about seventeen and had a figure like

the Capitoline Venus. Small, too, like Abus, but she had nothing in her at all but simple passions. She was going to Queensland with her whole family because her uncle had, in a fit of peevishness, pushed a knife rather farther into a friend of his than he had intended to. So far that the man died, and there were indications that a prolonged sea voyage would be beneficial to the uncle's health. "*Povero disgraziato!*" said Beppina. There were no surprises in her; she could be learnt at one meeting by anybody with any perspicacity at all. She had lived with an American artist for nearly two years, as I afterward discovered, with the complete acquiescence of her family. They insisted that she should be outwardly correct and make no scandal on board, for like most of the emigrants, the family was attempting to *far' effetto* and appear to be somewhat more distinguished and advanced in the social scale than they would have dreamed of pretending to be at home.

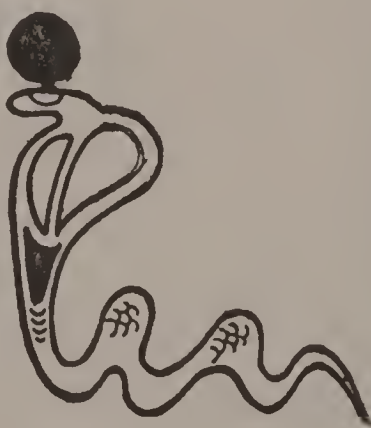
They announced that Beppina was engaged to the rich *signore Inglese*, *Il Signor Ellicotti*, who was travelling incognito, for reasons they were not at liberty to discuss. She was, they averred, very religious and unfortunately the *signore* was not as religious as they could wish, being in fact a Protestant, after the manner of

his compatriots, but he was privileged to have daily instruction with Padre Buonamici who was travelling in the second class, and there was every probability that his love would be the instrument of changing his heart with regard to religious matters. They expected a conversion daily, but such things could not be hurried. It was obvious, however, that *il signore* was serious because he had taken a cabin in the second class where he retired for many hours in the day for meditation, though, as he had a friend in the steerage, he would not transfer altogether to the second class out of delicacy.

Beppina's father was a ready liar when he was properly paid for it. The story he invented for the neighbours was invulnerable and he walked round the space allotted to third-class passengers, arm in arm with Ellicott and Beppina, once every day. It was cheap at 500 lire, Ellicott said, and all parties were satisfied. "If there should be any unforeseen results of the engagement," Beppina's father had said, it was understood that Ellicott should "make proper provision for them." Ellicott offered to pay something on account, but the man, struggling with his desire for a few extra lire in his hand and what he considered right-dealing with a man who had treated him well, said it was not

necessary between gentlemen. He had the utmost confidence in the honour of the *signore* and he knew that the *inglese* were always to be trusted and that his confidence would not be abused. Somehow the precious rascal contrived to bring into the sordid affair a kind of dignity which took the edge off it to some extent.

But I had my doubts, nevertheless, whether the affair would blow over as easily as Ellicot thought.





CHAPTER III

IN SPITE of the inconveniences and discomforts, the experience of travelling in the steerage of a great liner is well worth while. I would not recommend it to the ultra-squeamish and hyper-sensitive, but for young people who can cheerfully face the hardships of ordinary camping out, the steerage is not so black as it is painted on many steamships. I have since discovered that, on other lines, the experience can be as horrible as imagination paints it, but on a large, up-to-date ship, it is generally more than worth while for those whose income precludes all chance of travel in the first or second class.

Men and women are kept severely apart unless married, and they meet only on deck. Our ship was terribly overcrowded, as there were said to be about four hundred souls over the legal number for which the vessel was licensed. Every available corner of cargo space had been converted into barracks and from six to ten occupied the bunks in each compartment. Comparing the accommodations on sea with those on land, the

first class corresponds to the first-class hotels, the second to the average boarding house or small hotel, and the steerage resembles the common lodging house, Salvation Army shelter, or Mills Hotel. The steerage passenger is presupposed to be on the verge of being, not merely poor, but down and out. Yet he is paying about five dollars a day, for which one can expect decent accommodations on land in any country in the world.

Abus, whose specialty was keeping house and providing food for a large family, was horrified at the waste which goes on wherever men alone are in authority. "Men are not fit to attend to the kitchen," she said. Whole baskets of bread, vegetables, and entire joints of meat, not scraps and clippings, were thrown overboard daily. "Enough good meat to feed our village for a week," said Abus one day when she saw basket after basket tipped over the side. Some day a vegetarian diet will be tried in the steerage, saving fifty per cent. of the cost and adding fifty per cent. to comfort of the passengers, for no one requires the heat-producing foods in such quantity when they are compelled by circumstances to sit still all day long. Indifferently cooked meats are not very palatable anyhow and, since what is served once to the table is

never used again, a tenth of what is cooked, with skilful handling, would be sufficient.

We used to eat bread, potatoes, and an occasional nibble of other things, but the food, though it would pass any censor, was exceedingly unpleasant from pure indifference on the part of the cook. Anything would do for the steerage. Fortunately Ellicot had brought a goodly quantity of supplementary provisions in a hamper from Cambridge. "Would it had been twice as large," as Ellicot observed more than once; but we replenished it at each port with eggs and fruit which, above all, one misses from the ship's dietary.

On Sundays we had the celebrated plum duff of the sea. That, I doubt not, was intended by the authorities as a treat, but the cook, on that particular voyage, never put any sugar in it and sold the infinitesimal quantity he saved thereby to add to his income. After the first Sunday some of the men kept from breakfast an envelope full of sugar from the sugar bowls provided for the breakfast porridge; there were no sugar bowls at lunch time. A few shillings wisely distributed among the stewards and a present to the god of the second-class galley made a considerable difference to our meals when we discovered the right men. Thereafter we had pie

and delicacies from the first-class table twice a day with injunctions to eat them as secretly as possible.

There were, as I have said, nine in our cabin. Two were young plumbers who were travelling to see the world systematically. They stayed in every country they chose for a year or eighteen months: they could always obtain lucrative employment from the day of their arrival if they wanted it. Everywhere there is a demand for plumbers, and their master certificates were their passports. There was a gardener named Pharo, bound for a rich man's estate near Adelaide. There was a huge "bush-whacker" named Frank Forsyth who made good money clearing bush in the wilder parts of Australia. He was so strong that he could carry two bales of wire netting at a time (one was more than a load for the ordinary man), and his capacity for hard work, together with his cheerful disposition, had made him as popular as a politician in his own district. He was a good-natured giant with the soul of a child.

Forsyth was the life of our party: in the evening, when we were going to bed, he would put on his pajamas and lie down between the rows of bunks with his head out under the partition door which separated us from the passage and

pretend to be a watchdog in a kennel. It sounds a foolish game, but to see that huge frame, arrayed in yellow-striped pajamas, growling like a dog and catching the legs of people as they went by was something I shall never forget myself. Very little will amuse the bored, of course, and we were all very bored a good deal of the time.

Forsyth was a man who would certainly have rowed for Cambridge and become the idol of every sporting club in England if he had happened to have Eton behind him. He was a gentleman, if ever there was one. As it was he was a "bush-whacker" in the backwoods, but he did something to educate me by simply being alive.

Then there were two bakers, the brothers Stiff, one of whom was always ill and had a mean disposition to boot. He was for ever grumbling and so ill-tempered that we were all glad his *mal-de-mer* prevented him from being more active than he was. His brother spent a good deal of time apologizing for him by telling us that it was "'is stumick" that caused his irritability. I don't doubt that had a lot to do with it. "Tom's all right; 'e don't mean no 'arm. It's jest 'is nature—always was like that—but 'e's all right when you know him." I was never so fortunate.

Ex-sergeant Forster was another, a sad example of over-education in a small space. He hated England and the Army, in which he had served his time, and was leaving his native land for ever to be among people who could "recognize a man when they see him." If he had been made a sergeant-major it would perhaps have gone far to preserve his loyalty, but it would have stirred up mutinies and murders in the hearts of his subordinates.

Somehow I seem to remember another, a nondescript whose face I might recognize if I saw it, but who made no impression on me; I think he was an agricultural labourer and that his name was McLean. Perhaps he was not in our cabin, but that's the sort of man he was.

They were a good-natured lot of men on the whole, both in our cabin and elsewhere: I cannot sufficiently admire the psychologist who gave us our berths in the first place. He appointed the passengers under his charge by number and it was part of his job to put the right people together so that there should be no demands for changes afterward. Our cabin was certainly well done in the fraction of a second he had to devote to our several cases as we passed before him.

Lastly there was Billy. Billy King was not

in my cabin at all, but he singled me out for his friend from the beginning. Billy was from Bournemouth, where he had been a fishmonger and poulterer's assistant. He had a quick wit and was born with a desire to serve. I chose him for a friend, but he chose me for a master, and he called me "Sir" until I managed to stop him by explaining that it would make my life a burden to me if he continued. Billy blushed and said he would call me so on shore . . . and would expect to get his head snapped off if he forgot. He intimated that he knew his place and mine and that he would have been a real gentleman's servant if he hadn't been "reared so-rough." "And besides, I got a slight cast in my eye, and no real gentleman'd stand that for long, so I went in the fish and poultry line." Do what I would, I could not prevent his waiting on me. He called me in the morning and, possessing himself of my tea-basket, made me early morning tea "like I know gentlemen has it." That had to be stopped, too, but he was permitted to acquire merit by making tea for me and Abus in the afternoon. I verily believe he took a secret delight in pretending to be a "real gentleman's valet." I tried to talk to him on various subjects and to show that I felt something more than the relation of master and serv-

ant with him. I don't know if he ever believed it and though I wrote to him several times at intervals after we parted, he never answered.

Billy used to have tea with us, of course, and afterward he washed the tea things and faded to a respectful distance while I talked to Abus. He could not command privacy for me on the public deck, but he did his best to preserve a circle of comparative calm around the part we had chosen. At times when the crowd closed in on us, like syrup round an isolated berry on a plate, Billy would whisper confidentially where he thought we should be more comfortable and offer to carry our chairs if we wished to move. We never joined the hilarious circle of lovers who occupied the seats "up at the blunt end," as they called the stern of the vessel. Abus was correct in the extreme and gave the tongues of gossip no chance to wag.

She had been telling me one day of her life in Wales and how she had hoped to be able to study music and how she actually had learned in about a month to play the organ well enough to officiate in the village church. When she was about nineteen, she was obliged to give that up because her religious convictions changed from the Christianity of the neighbourhood to something else for which her limited vocabulary had

no name. She refused to believe in eternal punishment. "They say at home that I am mad," said she, "because I think that I have lived before, but that is not so. I am not mad so that I cannot cook and wash and clean house and manage all the money, but I do not believe in Heaven or Hell. How should I be able to stay in their Church, for they believe that? I know that I am not mad. Perhaps you think so, too; but I know it is true I have lived before. I think it was in Egypt that I lived. I think so because I remember. But you are laughing at me and you pretend, to see how foolish you can make me talk. Perhaps also you do not understand my English: I cannot speak English very properly because I speak always Welsh in my home. Also, I do not see many others, only my family and my husband, because I work so hard. There is always so much to do and I do it nearly all myself. Are you laughing at me? Truly tell me?"

I told her of course that I was not laughing at her at all and I asked what she had heard or read about Egypt.

"Nothing. I have not much time to read. You see, there is so much to do, and besides, in my village in Wales, it is among the mountains; there is nothing to read. And if I would read

I should be leaving other things—things which must be done. I should not know where to get the books and I have no time at home. I should like to read something . . . oh, it is all foolishness; I have never seen anything but only one photograph of the Pyramids which a sailor brought to my home when I was a child. But somehow I knew them although they were so broken and spoiled. It is not like that I remember them; they should be smooth and white . . . like . . . I think like marble. But how could they be marble, for they are very big and there is not so much marble in the world, is there?

“I thought to see something in the museum at Cardiff, on my way to London, but I think it is not a very good museum. There was nothing much to be seen, only pieces of coal, such as we burn in the stove, and many pieces of stone. Strange, is it not, there is not much in the museum at Cardiff? And Cardiff is a large town, the largest town I have ever seen.”

“London is larger than Cardiff,” I observed.

“Yes, I know, and you are laughing at me; but I was only one day at London, and the next day, in the morning, we came to the ship. I hoped to go to the British Museum to see if there was anything from Egypt there, but I did

not know how to go. I was frightened in London and I stayed all the day in the lodgings, for my brother was very busy . . . but I believe there are wonderful things in the world to see. I wanted to see pictures painted all by hand and to hear music. Then there are the palaces that I know, but they are not real. I think they are somewhere in the world, though. If I shall ever see them, I would know. But it is foolishness: it is not possible. How can you believe I have lived before!"

"Perhaps I don't believe it," I replied, "but many people, in different countries all over the world, do believe that we have all lived before and many, many times. I am not sure myself whether I believe it or not. Sometimes I think I can remember things myself, but I cannot remember them for more than a few moments. For example, there is one ever-recurring dream I have in which I seem to see two men walking before me with flails, such as you still use in Wales to thresh small quantities of corn, and they flog people who do not get out of my way, but of course I do not believe they ever did. . . ."

"But they did!"

"What?" I asked, sharply.

"I did not say anything."

I could have sworn Abus said it, and I will still swear that those words were said. Could she have said them without knowing it? We were not alone on the crowded deck and very likely I heard the common phrase out of somebody else's conversation, but its apposite answer to my sentence upset the thread of my thought for a moment or two. Then I asked her if she had ever heard of the doctrine of reincarnation.

Her look of blank amaze showed plainly that she had not. She had not been hearing me for several moments. She had a look, almost of fear, in her face, and her hand reached out for mine in the twilight for support and confidence and assurance. I held it, but I knew very well it was not an advance.

"There are others who believe they have lived another life, many other lives, in another place, at a different time, perhaps a hundred, a thousand years ago?" she asked, wistfully. "Then perhaps it is true; oh, I know it *is* true. And you are not making a mock of me? If I thought that I could kill you or die . . . I should die of shame. Have your fun . . . but not about that, Joseph. Tell me, truly?"

"Abus," I said gently, "I would not dream of making mock of you. It is true that people of some religions believe most firmly in reincarna-

tion, which means, 'to be in flesh again,' to be in the body again, that is. It is the keynote of what is believed throughout India, for example. There are three hundred millions of people in India who would be astonished to hear that anybody really doubted it. I think I believe it myself, because of some day-dreams which I used to have when I was a child. Certainly there are people in England who believe it. But tell me one thing more. Who told you my name, for Mr. Ellicot always calls me James and nobody else on board knows my Christian name? I generally call him James, too, though his name is Aethelred. Most people call him Ethel. I remember that you called me Mr. Joseph once. What made you call me that?"

"I don't know," she replied vaguely. "You look like him. To me you are Joseph."

I didn't think she knew what she was saying, so I did not press the question. She was thinking deeply, torn by emotions that she was trying to master. It had never occurred to her that there could be anybody else with her idea of the recurrence of life, and the realization that she was not alone in it seemed to make her memories more concrete, more real, more important to herself.

"My family say I must not think of these

things, and I try not to, but when he comes . . . and looks down at me . . . so . . . into me . . . into my very heart, I cannot help it!"

The evening bell, which announced the time for ladies to retire, rang loudly for several minutes but Abus did not move. She sat, gazing into space, with her chin upon one hand while the other lay forgotten in mine. It did not feel like a hand at all; it was dead, like a glove full of sand. Presently a deck hand with a broom in his hand came up and said: "Very sorry, Sir . . . Bo'sun's orders . . . Quartermaster'll be along in a few minutes." I pressed a few shillings into his hand, at which he gaped in astonishment. Tips are not common on the steerage deck and a few shillings in the abyss will accomplish what a golden sovereign will do in the first class upstairs among the gods.

"I see how 'tis, Sir," he observed, "but . . . if you was to go up to the second class presently . . . bow end . . . I think as 'ow I could square the steward. 'E's a friend of mine, and you could stay there as long as you was wishful to stay, but you can't stay just 'ere nohow, because of the light." And he vanished suddenly. I put my arm round Abus and made her get up. She did not resent my arm and for

a moment I had a sense of triumph. A moment, I say, for a moment later I saw by her expression that she was utterly unaware of my presence. She walked like one in a dream and leaned heavily upon me as we negotiated the companionway to the second-class deck. I found two chairs placed in a shadow just where the deckman had recommended me to go, and the wraith of a steward flitted round the corner as we sat down.

I have had the honour of sitting in the moonlight with a good many young women in my time, holding hands . . . and so forth, but I was very much aware that this was a new experience. Her little hand seemed to change: it was a real hand again, throbbing, sometimes cool and sometimes warm. It seemed to beat a rhythm of this change which, I doubt not, was due to my own excited imagination. I record what seemed to be, for I do not know what actually was in all that time. We were utterly alone and yet not alone. The darkness seemed alive with shapes which I almost saw. There seemed to be several people standing near her, like servants, I thought . . . but when I looked straight at what I thought I saw out of the corner of my eye, the shape did not vanish but simply wasn't there.

Abus was in a sort of a trance from which she was slowly recovering. I could have lifted her on to my lap so easily . . . but I did not dare to; that's the plain fact. In imagination I could feel her arms round my neck and her breath on my face . . . I was thrilled to the bone. Memories of the very remote past seemed to press themselves upon me. "I must get away," I kept saying to myself, "I must get away before somebody comes. This is not reasonable or natural. This is not like anything that ever happened before. This means death and nothing else . . . death. . . . Death!"

Suddenly Abus sat up and withdrew her hand. "He will not come now," she said. Her voice broke the spell that was upon me and I became aware that my dream and fear of death was in some way connected with her, for it ceased abruptly, as if cut by a knife, when she withdrew her hand from mine.

The air was empty; there was no sound but the rhythm of the engines and the faint wash of the water along the side. The mysterious wonder of the stars, including the disappointing Southern Cross, was upon everything. The moon swayed slightly in the sky, the warmth of the dark, and the deep joy which the tropical

night always brings to me, came like a smile and pervaded all my being as if it was something of my own. It would be hard to find any one who looked more obviously English than I do, but I am never at home in England as I am when my feet are upon sand and there are palm trees and bees in the sun-bright air. One of my earliest recollections, a dream which I have always thought was connected with a past life, was of being in a deep hole, with a light at the top, in which I sat with a bunch of fresh dates in my lap. And I sucked my fingers continually without making any headway at all.

"He will not come now," said Abus.

"Who is He?"

"It is Theoboama," she said seriously. "When he comes, how shall I refuse to see him? I do not ask him to come, I do not ask to see him; yet he comes and looks through me with his eyes. I have never seen eyes like Theoboama's. They are so large and still. Very serious are his eyes. I have never seen him smile in all the many times I have seen him, and he is coming since more than ten years now."

"Tell me about him."

"I was thirteen, and I was sweeping the kitchen. I was so tired after school that I sat down to rest for a moment. And I become

stiff all over and my arms feel as if they are tied to my bodie. And then he comes and looks at me. Theoboama is tall, very tall. His forehead slopes back. I think he is in a very good position of life, not like me now: I think he is very proud. He is very proud and his eyes I can see always. But I do not see him very often; I have not seen him at all on the boat. He came to me now, but I did not see him, only I know he was there. I think the people keep him away; he comes always when I am in trouble to help me, and if I go to do something wrong he is looking at me and I cannot do it."

"What does he look like?"

"He is dressed in folds, more like a dress it is, but not like a woman's. He is often dressed in red, not like wine, but like the stain of wine. And there is gold ornaments upon him and upon his arms. Some is like embroidery, with gold in patterns, but I do not think it would be very easy to do embroidery like Theoboama's. It is not possible. . . . Sometimes he has his head bound close also with the same cloth. I think it must be some kind of silk or fine linen, it is so beautiful. And there is sometimes a wide band of gold round his forehead, like a crown—no, I cannot explain what it is. It is not like the crown of the King of England, it is

more simple, though there is patterns on it, and it is narrow behind where it is tied on. Chains of gold hang down nearly to his shoulders like a fringe. He has ear-rings, too, but not like mine. His are dull gold and rough like they was made of fine grains of sand. Mine are long and blue, always blue, like the colour of the top of a wave before it becomes green. A deep bright blue, like the sky in the evening near the moon." The ear-rings she was wearing were made of half a bead of red coral set in gold, which does not look quite real.

"I think Theoboama must be in a very good situation of life; I think I should be afraid if he was to be English and of now . . ."

"Do you love Theoboama?" I asked.

She started violently, and in the moonlight, which revealed her face as she sat up stiffly, I saw that her face was distracted with fear and she said quickly: "I love my husband, he is very good and he loves me. He is the best of husbands, very true, as steel . . . very kind and tender is my husband."

For a moment she was silent. Then she continued: "I used to say that I would not ever get married until . . . but I had to marry my husband. I could not help it. He is very passionate."

"But you love Theoboama."

She did not answer.

"I know for five minutes before when he comes to me, and then I wash my hands and face and brush my hair and sit down and wait with my hands together, quite still. Sometimes Theoboama puts his arms around me," she said in an awed whisper.

"And are you afraid?"

"No. . . . I was afraid at first . . . I was only thirteen: that is why I asked my parents about him. But now, oh, no, I am delighted."

"You asked your parents about him, and what did they say?"

"Yes, at first, of course, when he came right into the kitchen where I was sweeping. I said: 'Who is that strange man, so tall, with the crown of gold on his head and the red dress?' It looked so strange to me, for I had never seen a man dressed like that before. But they would not tell me, so they said: 'Are you mad, child? No such person has come here. You have been dreaming instead of doing your work.' That was not true—I had swept all clean like always and I was very much ashamed and never spoke to them again about him, because they could not see him. Theoboama said I should speak with

them no more about him. Once he kissed me. . . . I was about sixteen then and I think he would kiss me now. But then I feel so ashamed because I am married. I thought that when I got married he would not come no more . . . that is why I tried not to be married . . . yet it is like a great joy, you know, for I remember many things that I have not seen, and I remember that other life, sometimes for hours afterward. I think I am not a servant . . . I cannot understand . . . because I feel so respectful toward Theoboama, and he treats me just as respectful, almost as if I was his superior, which is nonsense. And then things come into my mind which I cannot understand at all, but many familiar things also like brooms and saucepans and things I use, but not like those things I use now at all. I think sometimes I must have been a lady and not a simple country girl."

"They would say in the East that it is probable you did somebody an injury who was perhaps your servant, and you are compelled to be in a lower position as a punishment."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Joseph, that is just what I did! How could you possibly know that in the world! Even myself, I did not quite know it. Only Theoboama knows, and that he

will not tell me. I do not know anything about it except that it was a servant, and I did some wrong to him; I was so ashamed when Theoboama told me I had done so! Oh, I should not talk to you at all about this . . . it is foolish . . . it is not possible, so you will think me mad. I am afraid so, and yet I think you will not, for, as I held your hand I began to remember things as I do when Theoboama comes. Indeed he came, too, but I could not see him. I heard him going away: his shoes make a sound that I cannot mistake."

"What kind of shoes has he?" I asked, for want of something better to say. It was not at all what I wanted to say, but the thoughts flowed through me so fast that every question I asked was like something caught at random from a swift-flowing tide.

"I do not often see his feet," said Abus. "I had a funny kind of shoe myself, with pieces between my toes, all of gold. Sometimes his feet are bound up with cloth all over and sometimes he has shoes like mine. Sometimes there are separate places in his shoes for each toe, and the large toe is much longer than the others, pointed . . . each has a cap of gold. Sometimes it seems his feet are not quite on the ground at all. I cannot see his feet very often; I think they

are covered by his dress and I can see only his eyes when he is near. But do not tell any of these people. I should not have told you anything, but I have never met any one before who ever believed it was possible we have lived before. And perhaps you can remember something about him, or about that other . . . oh, I must be mad in truth, for it seems you have been there, too, but have forgotten, like me. Do not tell anybody. They will laugh at me; they will think me mad, but I know I am not mad. Help me to remember . . . something . . . it is so near . . . can't you? I can see a boy a little older than I am. He is so beautiful! I love him, why shall I deny it! He knows it, too, for I held out my arms to him and I know he loves me again but he . . . What is this that is happening to me? I was never like this before! Mr. Pyecote, if you can't tell me who he is, leave me alone. I must know. Fetch him back to me instantly . . . I *will* have it so, like a dog . . . leave me alone. Perhaps Theoboama will come to me . . . he always comes when I need help, and I need it now. Theoboama, if you desert me, how shall I ever be able to find him! Theoboama, Theoboama . . .” Her voice died away into a whisper.

I was startled by the passion in her voice, but I was completely helpless. The affair seemed to get more complicated instead of simpler. I reviewed the situation hurriedly. Baldly, I had been doing my best to flirt with a young peasant woman from the country. She would have nothing to do with me . . . like that anyhow, because she was married to a husband of whom she was terrified. Then, I realized that that is not the real reason, because she has a lover in a sort of Egyptian familiar, solid enough to kiss her but tenuous enough to float out of a kitchen window, "passing away by that kind of passing away which leaves nothing whatever remaining." And then to top off with, she invokes both me and him to help her find a lovely boy, whose neck I could wring with pleasure unspeakable at this moment. . . . I stepped back into the deepest part of the shadow about fifteen feet away.

She sat bolt upright, with her elbows close to her body, motionless and staring into the night, looking more like an Egyptian statue than ever before. Suddenly Abus rose, like one who stands because of the presence of a superior. She gazed straight before her with an expression of wrapt adoration. It was so beautiful and dignified that I forgot to be jealous and

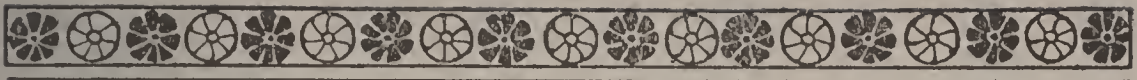
searched the empty dark before us to find what she, apparently, was seeing. I saw . . . no, it's absurd, I saw nothing: there was no shape of any kind, but I did see something which I can only describe as movement. The darkness seemed to move toward a centre and that centre was changed with power of some kind, something strong and very vital. I saw nothing that could be described in terms of anything but emotion, but my eyes did not wander in the obscurity looking for some object to focus upon. I could not have looked away from that point to a light, to the eyes of a wild beast, or the shape of a man.

My attention was concentrated with intense and lively interest upon a particular part of space in which there was nothing that was not equally everywhere else. I knew, however, that whatever it was, it was the same thing for which Abus had been waiting, for as soon as I had absolutely located the exact centre of my attention, Abus walked slowly forward as if humbly greeting someone. The movement in the darkness came towards her and almost enveloped her for a moment. For an instant I think I did lose sight of her, and when I saw her again distinctly, her head hung down and her arms were raised in the position of a woman who, held in

her lover's arms, lays her head contentedly on his shoulder, the shoulder of a tall man. She remained in that posture for several minutes.

The sense of intimacy, the intense privacy which I felt in the air, compelled me to look away. I felt that I was eavesdropping and that Abus and her familiar were entitled to the darkness of the night undisturbed. If I could have passed away silently without going near them, I would, but at my back was a stack of deck chairs which the steward had piled in preparation for the morrow's deck-washing. I could hardly pass Abus and her familiar without going through them.

I felt that Abus had become a thing of faery and without substance. I waited and held my breath. Presently Abus released him with regret, following with her eyes something which to me was invisible. She had forgotten my existence entirely. Glancing about her, she realized that she was on the second-class deck, where she had no business to be. She peered around her nervously but without seeing me, and then turned slowly and walked quickly away in the direction of the companionway and down the steps. I ran toward it and saw that she was walking quickly in the direction of the women's cabin in the steerage.



CHAPTER IV

I DID not sleep well that night. Vague and absurd memories, feeble echoes of what Abus had been telling me so convincingly during the day, flitted through my brain like the bubbles of gas in an open bottle of soda water. It seemed to me that every thought which came to the surface would explain something and yet each burst on the surface of my mind into blank nothingness.

I cannot tell what I thought during the hours I lay awake. I suppose I dozed and dreamed awake alternately. I thought a great deal about my brothers, particularly one whose name began with G and was on the tip of my tongue for hours. . . . I never got it. I have no brothers, nor sisters either for that matter, but in my dream I seemed to have dozens of them, most of whom were much older than I, nearly grown up while I was about ten or twelve. I was in a fever of passion for Abus such as I had never felt in her presence for hours on end. I had visions of Persians and Egyptians in end-

less procession, I seemed to see gold and silver vessels of odd shapes and the sound of a thrashing machine, and a great granary, too, and rats, which my terrier ran away from, whimpering. It was quite horrible to see old Spotto afraid of a rat! I was tormented by the smell of old wheat, a hot fermenting odour that made my head swim. My tongue was dry and there seemed to be neither air nor moisture in the cabin, though I was lucky in having my bunk next to a porthole.

When I was awake I hung my head out of it by the hour, but the same feeling of being parched obsessed me. I suppose it was because we were entering the Red Sea at the time; everybody complained bitterly of the heat. All sorts of strange, unimportant obsessions seemed to remain over from my dreams when I awakened. The sound of the water along the side of the ship sounded to me like the swish of grain upon an inclined plane, and the noise of the men washing the decks in the early morning sounded like the work of millers, for no reason upon earth. I kept repeating to myself, "the sound of the grinders is low, and the mourners go about the streets." I was thankful I had not taken my mattress up on deck, as some of the others had done, for to have been disturbed when

I was feeling as I did that morning would have put me in danger of the gallows.

I suppose I slept more than I thought, but my dreams were troubled even when I turned over for my last morning sleep. It was so vivid that I remember it now as if it had just happened to me. I dreamed I was playing cards with my grandmother for enormous stakes; faro, the game was. I wanted to win more than anything I ever wanted before in life. Faro, being a pure gambling game, does not interest me when I am awake and I have only an indistinct idea now how it is played. My poor old grandmother, who never permitted a game of cards in her house in her life, appeared to be an inveterate gambler. I wanted to win, but I knew that I was absolutely certain to lose. Abus leaned over me as I played at one moment and whispered in my ear: "Play to your last chip if you want the reward," and she laughed. I looked up into her eyes and knew what she meant, but I tore myself away from the table and ran for my life, shrieking, "I daren't, . . . I daren't . . . it means death!"

Billy King came at seven to see if I wanted anything, and I beckoned him in. "Billy," I whispered, "if you could get hold of a cup of tea this morning, with a stick in it if possible,

I'll come outside to drink it. I have had a rotten bad night."

"I slep' on deck; you better let me take your mattress up to-morrow. It ain't healthy sleeping down here in this heat nohow."

Beloved Billy, he got the tea in five minutes and announced its presence by the old cockney whistle, very softly, outside the door, which means "'Alf a pint o' mild and bitters" It meant volumes to me that morning. That helped, but I was not myself till breakfast was over.

Ellicot slept the sleep of the just, lying on his back with his mouth open. In his hand was a volume of Æschylus, still open, with which he had read himself to sleep. He was blithe and garrulous when he woke up and without a care in the world.

"Shike orf dull sloth an' joyful rise-a
To pay the morning sacrifice-a,"

he carolled, imitating a devotional cockney in a proper morning spirit.

"James," he said, sententiously, "I am exceedingly well this morning, and I want to have a long talk with you upon serious subjects, such as the Pyramids . . . and their influence on the present era."

"James, I thank you, and once again I thank you," I replied, trying hard to enter into his happy mood, which was far from my feeling and inclination of the moment.

"James," he continued, holding up the book, "this blighter Æschylus is worthy of more attention than is usually bestowed on him. But that blighter Freud is all wrong concerning the Œdipus complex and I shall write a large tome in the near future which will effectually dispose of him. Something Bepp said last night—or did I say it?—I dare say I did, but it gave me an idea."

"I had no idea that you discussed Æschylus with Bepp!"

"To tell you the truth, James, I do not. She has talent, much talent: more talent than I have ever encountered before . . . in certain directions, but, without disclosing a lady's secret, I am in a position to tell you that her talent does not include Æschylus."

All through breakfast Ellicot babbled along in this vein. We spent the morning together and he descanted at length upon the reaction of the sexes upon one another and the meaning and value of inspiration. With regard to Bep-pina he opined that he should be obliged to buy her and keep her in a hutch somewhere,

because, though her conversation "drooled along about nothing, hour after hour and day after day," she stimulated him in body and soul. "She is the finest lubricant for the mind, and I think she would not freeze at any altitude."

"James, that girl is like a drug. She has no soul; she is an animal, an animal of the finest quality and she fits me like a hat. If animal life could persist in a bottle, she ought to be put in a bottle and labelled with a skull and crossed bones. I know I oughtn't to take her. If she were in a bottle I could resist her better. If she smelt of a chemist's shop, I could recognize in her the dangerous habit, but, James, she does not smell of the chemist's shop. Not at all!

"But she is like the little pipe or the hypodermic needle, just the same. One jab of her under my skin and my blood turns to warm milk, all over, and if I could write, write down the dream then and there, I should enrich the world's literature with masterpieces of the same calibre as that blighter Æschylus.

"James, she is utterly worthless and at the same time has that,

‘ . . . most precious in men's eyes,’

and what am I going to do about it?

"I shall abandon her, I suppose, after 'betraying' her and continuing the 'ruin' which was begun by that artist chap (I bet he's peevish at her departure) somewhere around Anticoli, but let me tell you that it will be an act of great fortitude and self-denial on my part. It will be as difficult as giving up morphine. Perhaps every type of woman means that much for some type of man. I doubt very much if we are so wise as the Mohammedans who lock them all up. Beppina ought certainly not to be at large, but I'm glad she is, too.

"It must be terrible to be virtuous: the problems of life would be so enormously more difficult. What, for instance, does a pure man do when he feels inspired to produce his best by a woman whom his mind tells him is loose and utterly unworthy to be the mother of babes? What does he do when sorely tempted to take what is freely offered in perfect security by a widow woman he would have married if she had not arrived in his life too late, the alternative being her undying hatred? I don't mean, what ought he to do, I mean what does he? In India they say, 'Refuse not a woman when she cometh to you in her need.' In Europe we say, 'Refuse all women except the one you are tired of.' A noble precept since the hair shirt has fallen

into desuetude. And how often she is just as bored with you! It's a rum life!

"And what does the aforesaid man of perfect probity and rectitude when he, being a handsome young secretary, encounters the lovely young wife of a rich and powerful old man to whom she was married by her avaricious parents before she had been able to form a mature judgment of the married state, and she signifies her assent in the usual manner and so forth, perhaps loving in him for the first time in her life the physical and spiritual counterpart we all hope to find some day?"

"I can tell you that," I replied. "He runs away, if he's got any sense!"

"James, well art thou named Joseph. That is what your precious namesake did in the matter of the Lady Potiphar. In my opinion he was a plain, uncoloured, cowardly worm: and he probably missed the time of his life."

"Well, she was old, and fat, and ugly, James. I don't see that he missed so much."

"She was none of those things, James. She was young and sweet and fifteen. She had eyes like black sloes from Persia, and lashes like the first shadows of night. Her mouth was like a red plum and the pale gold of her skin melted into the sable fall of her hair. She was gracious

and perfect and ill-married, so much so that when she saw a man, though he was only a slave, meet to be her complete lover, who satisfied her entirely and made the blood within her leap to meet him, her passion overcame her long-taught modesty and she cried out for him and lost her head, poor child. Shame and terror combined to make her commit the abominable crime of accusing him afterward of something he hadn't the pluck to do, but she paid in full, with the agony of a lifetime's shame and devotion. Who knows if such a sin is expiated now, or can ever be expiated! You don't read poetry, do you? And you might easily never have read my friend Mullána Abdulkahman Jámí; he *is* a little tedious at times. I must tell you about Zuleikha same day, for the Bible, fortunately, does not preserve the only account of the incident—and I prefer the others."

"Tell me about it now. I am particularly anxious to hear the other version," I said.

"The process of the mummification of the human body is one which has always exercised a peculiar fascination for me. In ancient times, in the early period of Egypt, the process was long and complicated, but it became abbreviated for the poor until at last it was little more than injecting a certain amount of creosote. A sim-

ilar process applied to pigs in our day is that which makes the execrable bacon we had at breakfast. This brings me to the point I want to make. Did the Egyptian slave make a good quality ham or not?"

In that mood there was nothing further to be done with Ellicot. He could be utterly perverse and unreasonable. He was a closed book for anything serious as soon as he started off in that vein. He was like an encyclopædia on his own subjects, bound between the covers of a cheap joke book. I left him in disgust. Presently I found Abus, who tried to avoid me, but I cut off her retreat to the women's cabin and made her face me. She blushed scarlet when I came toward her and begged me not to remember any of the foolishness she had talked the night before.

"It is foolishness and not true, of course: promise me you will forget it and tell nobody. I must be mad to tell you such a nonsense!"

The bell for midday dinner made promises unnecessary at the moment and in the afternoon we were diverted by a funeral. An elderly man, in whom nobody took any interest because he was ill-tempered and quarrelsome, had been taken ill very suddenly on the previous evening

and removed at once to the hospital. Nobody seemed to know what had been the matter with him and nobody cared. The funeral took place at two o'clock. For one awe-inspiring moment he occupied the silent, undivided attention of nine hundred of his fellow men. His pall was the flag of his country. The clergyman read a brief service, as brief as possible, and the body was weighted and committed to the waters while the heart of the great ship stood still for one moment. The waters closed over that poor bundle, leaving no trace.

A burial at sea is an impressive occasion which I should think would touch every heart. One faint splash in the fathomless sea among so many myriads of similar sounds seems to awaken in everybody the dream of the day when that moment will come to him also. And after it, what have Fate and Eternity in store for the hungry soul? Rebirth or extinction? Reward or Punishment? What?

"Well," said my immediate neighbour, a red-faced man with freckles on his nose, "that's the end of ol' Bert! Ugly old boy 'e was and disgrerble? That's right. 'E ain't no loss. 'E was going to see 'is son in Orstrilia and plant 'isself on 'im 'cos none o' the family wanted 'im in England. Won't 'e be sorry, I don't think!

When's the bar open? My, but ol' Bert was disgrerble!"

"Guess the sharks has got him now!" put in another, hopefully, a young man with many blackheads on his forehead.

"Ain't no sharks here, 'cos why, we'd see 'em if so. They has their tail out o' water!"

"Not when they's swimming deep down, they don't, and it ain't their tail, it's their fin."

"'O care if it's their bloody fin or any other bloody part—there ain't none or we'd see 'em."

"I've 'eard as they follers the ship behind, on the look-out like, and that they know when somebody's going to die on board."

"Yus, thet's right!"

The conversation was becoming general and animated.

"I wouldn' be surprised if they was eating of 'im now—lots of 'em swim under the ship, waiting . . ."

"Your turn next, ol' Top!"

"Ever see a shark? I see one in a museum once. Ain't they got teeth, wot? Chore a man's leg off's easy as butter."

"Wish the bar was open—what time d'you say it opened?"

"Oh, my Gawd, nothing to do all the whole

bloody day but sit on yer trousers and 'elp wear out a chair!"

"D'you 'ear old Bert go plop? I missed it. I'd been waiting an hour and just that moment some silly blighter ast me something and I missed it!"

"Wish the bar'd open."

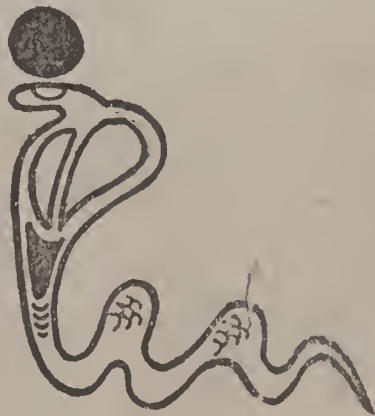
I thought, before I came, that I should like to meet my fellow man on equal terms, face to face and man to man, without any of the false values that social distinctions create at home. I wanted to get to know the soul of the man who has not had the chances of education and all the advantages which wealth bestows on many who are perhaps not worth any more in the beginning. In a general way I wanted to feel friendly to all men and to recognize their equality with me and mine with them. I suppose it is unusual in an Englishman to feel quite so democratic, but half an hour's conversation like that makes me yearn for the society of a bloated, belted earl—even a baronet would do. Conversation of that sort (and it never ceases, day or night, until the unconsciousness of sleep interferes with it), takes off the keen edge of my interest in my fellow man; and that was a special occasion when there was something real to talk about. I think it is easier to feel kindly to the masses when one is

at home with a volume of Karl Marx or almost anybody's book on one's knee. I must be fitted with a long-distance love, for I cannot stand very much of them close. My brain refuses to work that way. Like the preacher, I try to "seek out acceptable words," but I don't succeed in striking one in ten of the required variety. It is said to be hard for a man to step up in the social scale in England. It is easier to step up than down. Nothing but poverty, drink, or dirt can bridge the gulf that is set between the classes. The lower will not accept the higher as a companion, however hard the latter tries and however amiable he feels. He is never accepted as one of them unless he speaks the common tongue of misfortune, drink, or disease.

Occasionally an individual of the "lower orders" has a brain that does not spoil, or a gentle nature that endures and outlives the sordid work and circumstances of a mean existence. His ignorance is no bar to intercourse: what is degrading is the confident misinformation that distinguishes so many of his fellows. It is not ignorance but an awful wisdom, deformed into monstrosity. A little of it goes a long way with me and I drifted away in search of Abus as soon as I could go without seeming to

go to be rid of them. I handed round my common cigarette case before I went. It deceived no one: it might have been of fine gold. One man touched his cap, from habit, as he helped himself.

I found Abus by the windlass, looking out to sea at a vast school of porpoises that were churning up the surface of the sea about three quarters of a mile from the ship. She was a blessed relief.





CHAPTER V

FOR a long time I did not succeed in steering the boat of Abus's thought in the direction I wanted it to go. We talked of every superficial subject under heaven and at last drifted onto the subject of palmistry. She asked me if I knew anything about it and I did not scruple to tell her that it was one of my strong points. I have told the fortunes of many young women, sometimes with light in which I could hardly discern the shape of the hand, with complete success. I observed at once that she had more judgment than will—I thought she would prefer that, and I have seen palmists arrive at that, or the opposite profound conclusion, by gently squeezing the thumb and bending it. I told her that she was capable of the deepest and purest attachment and showed her which was the mount of Venus. I also asserted that she had a very unusual hand and that I had never seen one quite like it, which was one of the truest things I told her.

Utilizing much of what I already knew, I

pieced together a fairly creditable fortune which pleased her very much. I held her hand in such a way that I could press rather firmly at the base of the third finger, where lies the median nerve that is said to be intimately connected with the heart, indicating that this was of paramount importance. I never was able to see that it made any particular difference with any subject upon which I had formerly practised this piece of necromancy, but there is no doubt in my mind that it produced an effect upon her. I seemed to feel a throbbing almost as violent as that of the pulse, and the peculiar change of temperature, rhythmically alternating between warm and cool, that I had noticed on the evening before when I had held her hand. I glanced quickly at her face when I noticed it and saw that her eyes had a remote look in them which argued that she was not paying much attention.

"You know," she said, apropos of nothing, "I have a box which is made of a horn all polished, and it is bound round with silver bands with pictures scratched upon them or raised up—and the lid of the box has a very beautiful picture in silver, with a chain. And it is with holes through it, all cut round the pictures of people under some trees."

I saw at once that she was remembering some-

thing she had not seen in this life, for she could not explain what was clearly embossing.

"There is reddish brown powder in that box, almost yellow, and I use it in my toilet. . . . What for do I use it? I cannot remember . . . and there are the sticks, flat and rough, with points, which I use to rub. . . ."

"Rub what?"

"Oh, it is foolishness! What for should I do that! I seem to use them to rub my fingers to make them soft."

"A manicure set?"

"What is that? I do not know. I like to keep my hands clean and my nails cut and tidy, but what for should I rub them with anything? That is foolishness. They would get all rough at once with the washing, anyhow. My family laugh at me for the care I take of my hands, as it is."

"Remember some more."

"Oh, I call to mind a mirror that I use, but not of glass. It is thin like the bottom of a frying pan and so polished I can see my face, but the handle is strange . . . it is beautiful, I cannot deny that, but . . ."

"'Beauty touched with strangeness' is art. What is it like?"

"Is it possible people have such things? I am

ashamed . . . but somehow, I see it very distinctly in my mind . . . something I use very much, but the handle is made like a naked body . . . smooth and white like ivory. What ideas I get!"

"Look in the mirror and tell me what you see," I said, with my heart beating abominably.

"I do not see it now. It is of that other life. My husband would not let me have such a thing, and yet, if I had, I should not like to lose it: it is very beautiful, but people ought not to look at it. When I see my face in it, it is just the same as I see myself in any glass. Except the blue ear-rings, and the blue beads in my hair, oh, so many, like little sticks are many of them and no two are exactly alike. I should think they must be made of china: they are so blue."

"Do you think you use that powder on your face?"

"I do think so, but, what a nonsense to have a yellow face—all yellow!"

A people as fine as the Egyptians can never have used white powder on their faces as the pathetic Negroes of American cities do. If they were dark, they should have used a deep powder, not to alter the colour but to unify it and make the artificial bloom which art seems to demand as the finish to an elaborate toilette.

If the Egyptians were white, or nearly white, they may still have used turmeric or some other yellowish powder, as many of the oriental races do . . . that, at least, Abus could never have invented, for she herself thought it absurd. To me it was an assurance of her sincerity, though I have not the faintest idea what Egyptian ladies decorated themselves with. Abus could not have known, either, of course; yet she remembered it.

She laughed as she pulled her hand away. "It is when you hold my hand like that that I talk so foolish—that is enough now; let me go.

Of course it had to be that moment when Ellicot passed me doing his daily "grind" round the deck with Beppina's father. I could see clearly that he thought I was "getting on" and the thought infuriated me. I do not doubt that I frowned and looked all my annoyance, for he laughed and winked knowingly as he passed on. Abus was utterly innocent of the meaning and the import of his smiles and winks. She did not approve of him and thought him vulgar. I do not think she saw them at this particular time at all.

"Why do you look so angry?" she asked. "Is it because I take my hand away?"

"No, I was thinking . . . Abus, how do

you come to have such a peculiar name; is it Welsh?"

"No, and it is not my name that I am christened. I am christened Lily Gertrude but I was never called so. When I was two, my mother tell me that I changed my name one day and would hear no other than Abus. It was a wonder in the village that I said my name was so and would hear no other. So they called me Abus, though when I got older they spell it Abbess because that at least is an English word. They called me Lily because I was so white, but I cannot bear it. Abus has no meaning now, but Theoboama said it means a sigh . . . that is pretty, is it not?"

"Tell me about him."

"No, Joseph, I will not tell you of him, not now."

"Then tell me more of the things you use, because I may be able to find out something more about him—for you."

"I cannot remember much now . . . and if you force me to tell you, I might say things which were not true, without meaning to speak untruth. I remember little or nothing, only some large bottles of pottery, very tall, though there are little ones, too. They have two round handles at the top and are pointed at the other

end. I do not know what they contain; different things, I suppose. In some places there are many of them, almost buried in the sand. There is a smell as of wine in that room."

"If they have pointed bottoms, they cannot stand up then?"

"They are strange. I have never seen anything like them in Wales, but we use them like that. I suppose it is the custom. They stand up in the rings of pottery material or stone which are set in the ground, though sometimes you can move them about."

I drew the shapes according to her description on the back of an envelope. I drew several varieties, purposely drawing them wrong to see if she would correct them. She had meant the Egyptian amphora which was used for oil and wine. That is beyond all shadow of doubt. I tried her with many different patterns, some of which she thought much more practical, but she said, "Mine are not like that." She was absolutely sure what she meant and talked of everything as if they were still her property.

A loud squall from little Llewellyn, her nephew, aged six, interrupted any further memories at this juncture, and I inwardly cursed little Llewellyn, though he was a nice little boy

who should not have been cursed. In a moment the dreamer was gone. The practical mother side of Abus rushed him to her cabin, where she bathed and bound up his injured finger, telling him that if he would touch knives in the galley when the cook was not looking, they would always bite him because he didn't know their names, so he could not expect them to play with him. I was beginning to wonder if she would ever come back, and had already started in search of a book to wile away the time when she reappeared, leading a proud child with something to show every other child on board with the vivid comments and speculations of childhood on the danger he had passed through. I felt it was going to be difficult to bring her attention back to Egypt, but I took her hand as she sat down and the look I had come to love to see in her eyes flitted across her face like a bird shadow.

"Would you like to go back to Egypt?" I asked.

"How I would like to go!"

"And would you come with me?"

She hesitated. "No," she replied, "and yes . . . gladly—if you were a woman and not a man, I would go. . . . Theoboama would not let me go with you now."

"But if there were no Theoboama, you would? And perhaps he would let you."

She shook her head very decidedly. For a moment the thought of her husband did not occur to her, so deeply was she immersed in the past and the incredible present. She glanced about as if expecting someone to speak to her. I fancied somebody had spoken to her and she did not hear. The evening was unusually quiet on board. Everybody was sitting still, reading or talking, the noisy element was in the bar-room, which was a long way from where we were sitting, the children were absorbed with the account of Llewellyn's injury, and many people were preparing for the evening meal.

"Theoboama is here," said Abus, suddenly, "but I cannot see him. He says I shall not go to Egypt, that it is not yet time. He has a look on his face of one who is very jealous, not angry, but jealous nevertheless. He smiles, I think now. . . ."

"But you said you couldn't see him?"

"Stop . . . stop your talk and hold my hand," she said sharply. "Listen . . . I feel in my arms . . . he is going to be more clear in a moment. He says you may see him, too, but not if . . . he smiles. He is saying that if you hold my hand and are quite pure

in your heart, and . . . I mean, if you are pure to me and would not wrong me, you shall see him."

"Really see him?"

"As much as you see me . . . if you have only pure thoughts about me. You are to look steadily and without moving your eyes or blinking them at all."

We were sitting on the open deck, and the prospect of a supernatural manifestation amid the sights and sounds of the steerage of a liner was the last imaginable probability. I felt that Abus was absolutely honest in her memories, and some things seemed to bear proof in themselves that they were genuine memories beyond the tomb. If I had pure thoughts! I had not had the least vestige of a pure thought about Abus in the beginning, but now, I was so carried away with a real and deep interest in the extraordinary developments that followed day after day in regard to her, that I had little room for any feeling but that of wonder, alternating sharply with waves of unbelief.

My ridicule, no word of which escaped me of course, did not take effect upon my mind. All the time something very deep within me said: "Such things have been, and this is a true case, however many impostures there may be."

My intelligence chafed before the supernatural, my intuition accepted everything as perfectly natural, without questioning. I held the little hand of my companion and tried my best to control myself, for I was trembling with excitement. What was it that I was going to see? I had no doubt whatever that I should see something, and something strange and inexplicable.

For some moments I imagined I saw something corresponding to the movement I had seen in the night air on the second-class deck. In a few moments there was no doubt about it whatever. There was a movement as clear and rapid as that which is sometimes seen above a locomotive in a station, a clear, shimmering movement caused by escaping heat. It concentrated itself at about six feet from where we sat and I certainly did begin to see something unusual and inexplicable forming within it, something like a reddish haze which slowly took shape and became a figure.

It gradually became denser and more solid-looking until it was just not transparent. I saw the long folds of an oriental dress and gold ornaments vaguely indicated. I saw the face of a very distinguished man; not very young . . . I saw his astonishing eyes, long, deep, slanting eyes in which the whole mystery of the

Orient and the ancient world seemed to be symbolized: they looked straight and intensely at me and I felt ashamed ever to have had a suspicion of light thoughts about Abus. He glanced at Abus proudly and lovingly with a strong, masculine, possessive air which gave me more than a momentary twinge of jealousy. She belonged to him and I was . . . what was I? Somehow I thought he gave me an almost friendly glance through his antagonism. Was it that he tolerated me as one who exalts the desirability of his lady by desiring her in vain? The moment the thought of rivalry came into my mind, he smiled and raised his hand in ancient salutation: then he became vague in outline; I became aware of the auxiliary binna-cle showing through his chest and he slowly vanished.

"Did you see him?" whispered Abus, anxiously, I thought.

"Yes."

"Clearly, as clear as you see me?"

"No, but clearly enough to see him smile."

"He is not angry . . . with me, nor with you, but he says you shall not go with me in Egypt. It is as he says. You think of me as you should not think of a woman who belongs to another. But if you saw him at all, it means

you are not bad and would not wrong me. That is why Theoboama smiled. If you thought of me . . . like a bad woman . . . you would not have seen him at all. In this life I am not for you . . . and he also is being punished . . . and I, too."

"And your husband?"

She hung her head and blushed deeply. She murmured something I could not hear, for the supper bell clashed upon the air suddenly and chairs were moved. Bored and hungry people were clattering toward the dining room for the great event of their day. She was repeating something beneath her breath and, I think, did not mind my bending over her to listen, as I hid her embarrassment from the other passengers by so doing. She had not withdrawn her hand, which hung in my grasp like something forgotten, and as I took the other to help her to get up out of the depths of her folding chair, I heard her repeating her litany of "I love my husband . . . I love my husband . . . I love my husband . . ." and suddenly: "I must go see that those children are made ready for supper. Good-bye . . . thank you. Let me go."



CHAPTER VI

“Les jours se passent, et se ressemblent.”—VERLAINE.

IN NO place in the world is one day so like another as on board a big ship in calm weather. The hours and the days slip by and nothing gets done, nothing happens beneath the eternal vigilance of the watch high up and remote from such dross as steerage passengers. The wildest enthusiasm is evinced when a porpoise pokes his nose out of the vasty deep or a turtle is encountered floating about in the great spaces of the sea like a child lost in the green meadows. Flying fish are exciting for half an hour or so and after that cease to be a novelty which anybody notices, like aeroplanes.

What a chance for education is wasted in all this vacant time when those who go down to the sea in ships are in a frame of mind to absorb information of almost any kind greedily! If someone can recognize the Great Bear and find the polestar, anxious people begin to assemble to listen to his words of wisdom. The wildest superstitions find expression on every topic un-

der heaven and are generally solemnly accepted as immutable facts. The depth of ignorance which the masses possess is unfathomable. In their idle moments, like these, one begins to realize how this is the veneer of what we are pleased to call civilization. The people who go to Australia are not the dregs of the English people; on the contrary, they are the best of the labouring and artisan classes, for Australia is strict about immigration and is no longer willing to be a dumping-ground for Britain's human refuse. Every man and woman must be healthy and of decent reputation. They must have a trade and a certain amount of money or be guaranteed in some way so that they will not become public charges. Australia feels competent to supply the demand of her own prisons and hospitals without appealing to the Mother Country.

And all these thousands of human souls, each knowing some tiny trade, a little group of primitive facts, and a modicum of experience, which enables them to keep alive and continue their race, are having a real holiday, often for the first time in their lives. The labourer, from the time he leaves school, has little time to sit down and reflect upon the origin of man and the causes of his existence. He must work at something which does not engage more than a third

of his brain capacity, little as that is. At home, unless he is too tired to do anything at all but sleep, he must contribute to the life of the home, which his labour outside supports.

The average labourer is often too tired to love his wife and children; the resting muscles have little to spare for emotion. He does not read nor attempt to read anything but the newspaper, and that becomes little more than a ponderous perusal of the large type and a look at the pictures, ending in slumber. If he is sufficiently intelligent to get books from a circulating library and attempt to read, he seldom finds any one willing or capable of directing his reading or to explain what he does not understand. He has no time to go deeply into anything, even if he has a desire for education. He reads for amusement if he reads at all, and the things which amuse him at forty are very little in advance of the things which amused him at fourteen. Never before has he had long days and weeks on end when there is absolutely nothing for him to do and the anxiety of keeping a job and of providing food for himself and his family entirely removed from him. His brain relaxes until it chafes for occupation which smoking and drinking do not adequately supply. He wishes he had brought some books with him,

but they were forgotten because, as he never thought of them before, it was not likely he would begin to think of them during the excitement of packing up for a trip across the world.

The steerage passenger is in a receptive mood in which he would accept anything with interest and gratitude. Everybody is making a great effort to appear to best advantage. Everybody wants to be affable to the stranger and to be liked by him and to make friends. The competition for food is gone out of life, temporarily, and there is no need to regard the neighbour as a rival or an enemy. Some who never wear a collar at home—indeed, have no collars—will put a clean handkerchief round their necks to be a little more dressy at meals than at other times. Nails that have never been systematically cleaned begin to come in for a certain amount of attention. No word of criticism has been spoken but perhaps a smart neighbour at the dinner table has glanced at the fingers with some disgust, causing the hand to crumple them into its palm. Little things are beginning to be important because the big things are provided for: is that the beginnings of civilization? The humbler imitate the more distinguished in little ways that are pathetic to see. Everybody is attempting to give the impression that he is a

little higher up in the social scale than he happens to be. The snob blooms into the fine flower of his kind, of course, but for the most part the influence of a long sea voyage is good in that it makes men think and wish to be better and finer within the bounds of their imagination. Perhaps it is the first time they have ever had occasion to measure themselves against their fellow men in social matters with minds free from the stultifying anxieties of every-day life on shore. But there is nothing to read which tells them of sea and sky, the countries they are passing by, and the lives of those who live there, so different from their own. They do not want the religious tracts that are sometimes distributed, though they sometimes read them through to the bitter end, as slowly as possible, without deriving any mental reaction from the words at all. All the magazines on board are read from cover to cover of course, but they do not last very long. There are countless hours when there is absolutely nothing to do at all but eat and sit and sleep and eat . . . and sit again.

There is a chance to make civilization mean something to those who are under the heel or in the death-grip of the ogre called "Work." Their minds are open and ready for information and suggestions. They talk their rudi-

mentary metaphysics, religion, and politics in terms which an educated man can hardly believe are genuine . . . he feels, unwillingly, that these people are as different from himself as if they were of another species, as different as a lizard from a fish. And what waste . . . what waste it is!

Ellicot and I discussed this matter at great length on many occasions, and when I see his name to-day, prominently interested in the Mission to Seaman and such-like institutions, I wonder if he ever has waves of memory which bring back to him, in his respectable security, the flotsam of any of those conversations.

I hesitated for a long while before I told Ellicot anything about Abus and the discoveries I was making in her. I did him an injustice. In the frank panoply of his sensual orgy of the moment I forget the other, deeper side to his nature. I told him about it at last, however, in a superficial way, expecting him to jeer at my credulity and hint that the guile of women for the entanglement of men's hearts was unfathomable and illimitable. He did no such thing. He was intensely interested and suggested, what I never thought of myself, that the sooner I could get her to accompany me to a museum of Greek and Egyptian remains, the better. He

observed that if she had had a carved ivory mirror and remembered most vividly the refinements of feminine adornment she was no serf, but had been a great lady in her past life.

"It would be amazingly interesting if she could remember something which could be connected up with something we can absolutely prove. Try and get her date. Abus sounds Egyptian to me, not knowing what anything Egyptian sounds like, but I can imagine an ideograph of an ibis and a pussycat and waggly serpent meaning 'Abus' very easily! Theobrama suggests the Greek influence in Egypt: Mrs. Kokké Physkon . . ."

"And who may she be?"

"Less than nothing now, James, but your ignorance is truly distressing. Old Physkon married a girl from Alexandria called Cleopatra Kokké, who became somewhat talked about because she had an affair with an old gentleman of fifty-four, named Julius Cæsar. He was a Roman general, and you know how roguery poguey elderly military men are apt to be. When he went back to Rome he left a good-looking chap named Antony in charge of his army—yes, I see you have guessed the sequel, it happens only too often that way!"

"Well, as I was saying, that would make her

date somewhere about B. C. 50, if she ever powdered her nose with yellow to go and dine with them. Then again she might have been earlier than that. Herodotus must have been personally conducting himself through Egypt around B. C. 460. It's some time since I read the *Euterpe*, the book in which he describes Egypt, but, if she was alive in his day, she may have met him! Try her on Herodotus. Try and find out who Pharaoh was in her time. James, let's swap girls: I'd like to ask her a lot of questions."

Knowing how much Abus disliked Ellicot I knew she would never allow him to discuss such subjects with her, even for a moment. I felt also that she would strongly disapprove of being discussed with him at all, so I told him that was entirely out of the question. Nor was he really very anxious to do it, but he gave me a number of useful suggestions to think over. His classical knowledge prompted all sorts of combinations; he knew in such an intimate way who was alive with whom and exactly when generals fought and potentates travelled that I was tempted a dozen times to risk Abus's displeasure and to try to bring them together. But then . . . I had seen Theoboama only mistily . . . and I would not trust Ellicot with any-

thing feminine that had the remotest interest in me for a minute longer than was absolutely necessary. He was a great deal more fascinating to women than I, with all my conceit, ever thought of being. I knew very well he could win any woman away from me that he was exposed to, almost without knowing he was doing it. Love-making was second nature with him; it was his hobby and diversion, he claimed that he sharpened his wits on girls and they were the keenest wits I have ever encountered in anybody. No, while I could keep Abus, even the little I had of her, I meant to hold the centre of the stage.

“Perhaps she is Queen Tii rediviva; she looks like her,” he said, musingly. “She was the beautiful peasant with whom Amenophis III fell in love when he was on a hunting expedition. St. Chad Boscawen, the Egyptologist, told me the story of that romance, how Pharaoh gathered her up and made her Queen of Egypt. Perhaps she has reverted to the peasant quite naturally in this incarnation. She wouldn’t be Cleopatra, she’d have been considerably more up and coming. Habit once acquired is hard to break!

“I have it, James. She’s Potiphar’s wife, and you are Joseph; mean, sheeny Joseph, but toler-

ably reformed into a decent enough chap at last, old man! No offence intended, and all that. Theoboama may not be an Egyptian at all. The description of him sounds more Medic or Persian to me, and he might easily have acquired a Greek name if he hailed from Alexandria. It was the custom for aliens resident in Egypt to take an Egyptian name. Maybe he was her brother or someone who loved her before she was sent to Egypt. I must certainly tell you about Yusuf and Zuleikha some day. It's a pity you don't like poetry."

"Can't you . . . ?"

"Sorry, old man, I must be going now. Bepp's got an appointment with her priest and I need a little instruction before I am finally received into the Church. The theory of Indulgences is what I am studying just now, and I am ten minutes overdue now."





CHAPTER VII

AS WE came nearer to Freemantle I had begun to look forward hopefully to taking Abus to a museum. There must be something of the kind there, I thought, and I had no doubt in my mind that it would be a marvellous experience. It was not so easy as I anticipated to get her to agree to accompany me, though I could see she was eager to go, and eager to go with someone who could tell her something about the exhibits. When she refused, I could hardly believe my ears, for I had regarded it as a foregone conclusion. This was not an ordinary matter, and I felt that I must move heaven and earth to make her come. She must . . . !

“I should not wish any one to know I went on the shore with you . . . I am not such a woman”

And I realized, suddenly, and with amazement, that going on shore with me would mean only one thing in the eyes of our fellow passengers. One forgets that in the lives of the uneducated any departure from the things of sense

is unusual and suspect. A museum, to their minds, is a place to exercise the children away from street traffic or else a courting ground, what else? I had to bring all my powers of persuasion to bear upon her before I could get her to listen to me at all: I was in despair at her steady refusal.

But at the last moment she decided to come; however, making one condition only: that we should go to no hotel nor leave the boat together, obviously in company. We went to Perth by train separately, therefore, and I met her at the railway station.

Western Australia has a peculiar brand of fierce, desiccating heat which makes one forget that there is any other weather anywhere. From Freemantle, which is the port, to Perth, the city which passengers visit during the few hours the ship stops to discharge cargo, the train skims through an atmosphere in which even its speed does not produce an illusion of coolness. It was hot air which rushed past the blinding windows, the hot air which had twisted the blue gums into strange contortions and made their trunks like bones that have passed through a furnace fire. The long sickle-like leaves of eucalyptus trees throw almost no shadow upon the rolling dunes, tufted with dead grass and strug-

gling, stunted vegetation. The sand looks hard with whiteness and the heat of the bleak, eternal, and unappeasable summer.

We had lunch together at a restaurant, since food was needful, and ascertained from the restaurant keeper that there was a museum, though he could tell us no more about it than its general situation. We took a cab there and I asked the first attendant at once if there was an Egyptian section. There was not, but he thought there was a room in which there were many statues and some Egyptian things might well be among them. There were all sorts—Pass to the right—and we passed.

Somehow the reality of Abus's dreams and experience seemed to become less credible to me when I was on shore. She was not so confident and self-possessed herself, for one thing, as she was on board ship. Fresh from an English university and as thorough a snob as most boys of my age, I felt uneasy with Abus in her best clothes. They were dreadful, and I felt that every eye was criticising and questioning us. I was dressed in an ordinary suit, gray, with white trousers and a soft hat, but I was conscious that it looked painfully dressy in Perth, especially beside my odd-looking companion. On board, Abus wore a simple skirt and blouse, without

anything exaggerated about either. To-day she had put on a black dress, evidently her Sunday outfit, which belonged to no period that I could identify. It suggested the 1880 bustle period, with the bustle omitted. It was a close-fitting creation, long and decorated down the front with an intricate pattern of dangly strings of small black beads which shed themselves every now and then. Her head was enveloped in a spotless white sunbonnet with thin black stripes which she had put on because it hid her face from any but those exactly in front of her. It had a kind of flounce, like the petticoat of an armchair, which reached to her rectangular shoulders, and she walked very stiffly, with her arms slightly bent and her elbows as close to her body as her corsets would allow. She was grotesque in a way, and I was embarrassed by the notice I thought we should create. Fortunately Perth did not see us with my eyes.

Another thing contributed nothing to put me at ease. Walk how I would, she was always a little behind me as if hiding from someone. She would not take my arm, but when we passed the turnstile in the museum she was pale with excitement and fright. She clutched my sleeve and held on to it a little above the elbow as I led her into the sculpture gallery. She had never

seen anything like it before and she held her breath with the wonder of it.

I saw nothing Egyptian at first glance, but it seemed to me I had better improve the shining hour by telling her as much about the sculptures, which of course were all casts of things in European museums, as I could. The winged bulls of Assur-bani-pal, for instance, that are one of the glories of the British Museum, were on the left as we entered the little gallery, and I began to tell her a little about Assur-bani-pal and the civilizations of Babylon and Nineveh; of the great walls and hanging gardens and of the excellent laws of Hammurabi. I told her that the huge cities which were once the centre and fountain head of civilization were now no more than huge mounds which men in our time were digging up slowly to learn something of our forefathers, dead and forgotten for thousands of years. Hoping to engage her interest, I proceeded to tell her of the Babylonian version of the Flood in the Bible and how the ancients wrote upon soft clay with a little stick instead of with ink upon paper.

She gaped up at the winged bulls without any particular interest. Her mind was not taking in anything I said. I was disappointed and felt that as a showman I was not going to be a suc-

cess. She stood almost behind me and held firmly to my sleeve so as not to lose me among the stern white crowd of figures on every side. Suddenly she started violently and murmured something I could not catch.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I know that man," she replied, as if she were afraid he would overhear her. There was not a soul in the gallery besides ourselves and I thought of course that she must be seeing a vision.

"Who? Whom do you see: is it Theobama?"

"No—that man over there."

"But there is no man there."

"I mean, that photograph . . ."

Fortunately I remembered suddenly that a peasant is very apt to call anything a photograph, and I was right. She meant a colossal head which had escaped my notice. It was Egyptian, of course.

"I know that man!"

The unbelief which terra firma almost confirmed in me surged to the surface. I could not treat the matter quite seriously among the statues of the past. They were so cold and remote: we were so small and alive, so intensely solid and material, while they seemed to be wraiths es-

caped from Eternity, frozen and labelled. Side by side, at a little distance from the great head to which I led her almost against her will, I noticed the figures of two gods. I could not keep the irony out of my voice as I said:

“And do you perhaps know Isis and Osiris, who are sitting next to your friend?”

She looked up at the impassive faces of each without recognition. “No,” she said gravely, “I do not know them, but this man I know . . . as he were my own brother!”

Abus was seriously claiming acquaintance with a priest of Ptah, dated “About B. C. 1300. From Thebes.” I was speechless with astonishment in spite of the fact that I had brought her to the museum in the hope of hearing just such revelations. But now it had happened . . . and I could not doubt her absolute sincerity for a moment.

There was a glass case containing a few genuine shards and fragments of various sorts. That and another upon the other side of the room seemed to be all there was to see that was genuine. There was not even a mummy; I had expected that a mummy would awaken some interesting memories . . . I gazed around, unwilling to believe in its absence. I felt cheated . . .

"Those are the bottles I told you about, but they are all broken; that is the kind of handles like those you drew for me on the ship, and here is the ring for them to stand in, as I told you. Those are like I use, they must be Egyptian. But why are they all broken?"

"Some which are still whole are preserved in great museums, but you must remember that nearly three thousand years have passed since those pieces of pottery held wine and oil for the Egyptians to whom they belonged. A lot of things can happen to a perishable object in three thousand years!"

Abus scarcely heard. She was looking for things she knew and did not want to be told anything about them. She forgot to keep hold of my sleeve and hurried across to the other glass case alone, in which there was a replica of a golden crown, the original of which is in the British Museum, and a dagger and several other small objects.

"That is Theoboama's sword," she said, in an awe-struck whisper, pointing to the dagger, "and that is his crown—no, it is not his, because his is narrower at the sides and at the back, but that one is like it. And . . . those are like my beads, my blue beads. Come, there must be more . . . perhaps we shall find my box

and find out what for I use the yellow powder. It cannot . . . cannot be for my face, that is foolishness!"

"Where shall we see next? It is not possible there is nothing else of mine!" She took my coat lapels in both hands and looked up eagerly into my face. She was irresistible in her enthusiasm.

"There is only one thing more which is ancient and beautiful," I said; and, grateful for the lack of interest which the people of Perth have in sculptured antiquities, I put my arms round her and kissed her.

She was utterly taken by surprise, but she did not struggle. She drew herself up and looked at me coldly.

"I am not now willing you should kiss me, Joseph, and I have never let you think so. For why have you done this? I am ashamed for you."

In a few minutes peace was restored by apology, and I began to tell her expurgated stories of the Greek gods and goddesses, to which she listened attentively. The *pièce de résistance* of the gallery was, of course, the Venus of Milo. The original, I told her, was not made of plaster like the one before us, but carved in marble, and it stood in a great museum in Paris called

the Louvre. I told her how people had disputed about the position in which her arms must have been and of the legend that when she was found she was complete, and that the arms were broken during a fight that took place for the possession of her. She gazed at Venus like a simple sight-seer, and made no comment. I could not fathom what she was thinking nor how much she understood of what I had told her about that or any of the others.

“What do you think of her,” I asked, “and do you perchance know her?”

“No, I do not know her . . . she is very beautiful, but . . . all bare!” she answered, blushing a little. “Is she a Frenchwoman? . . . But come and see . . . if we can find the palaces that I remember . . . oh, so long ago . . . it seems to me even before Egypt, I think. They are white, and even the windows are of stone: they have no glass in the windows, but patterns, all cut in stone like . . . like crochet work. Do you think we can find anything about them?”

I felt dubious enough about those palaces, but seeing that the Greek gods could not hold her attention, I started in a new direction where, by chance, my eye fell upon some architectural pictures and photographs. Among them were

some enlarged photographs of Indian palaces, to which she ran eagerly. The Taj Mahal was one of them, I recollect, and there were some others which showed windows with lattice of carven stone.

“There,” she said, “are the windows! No, they are made like that, but they are not of my palace that I remember. They look like them a little, and if I looked at them long, perhaps I might imagine that I remember them. I think they are not the same . . . oh, that is so long ago! I think I am a very little girl of ten or twelve at most when I saw them. And these are only photographs in brown, but I remember a shining white and deep blue sky and pools in which there are tiles with patterns, in colours, and fishes that eat from my hand, and roses and irises . . . Joseph, can I have imagined all that? There are such places in the world, are there not, where a little girl might have played with a white goat? Joseph, I love all the things I have told you, but when I think of those palaces which I remember not nearly so distinctly as the others, I feel as if I must cry out aloud . . . I shake inside . . . I feel it, all down the front of my bodie. I never thought of the little white goat till this minute, but I shall never forget him again! Oh, Joseph

. . . do you think I am a little mad after all?"

I comforted her as well as I could, for she was really disturbed by all the wonders she had seen. Perhaps also the blinding heat affected her. She clung to my arm without reserve for protection and comfort, the faint vague shadows of which I endeavoured to supply. I was not a little bewildered myself at all that had happened. The situation of comforting an Egyptian princess for, among other evils, the loss of a pet goat, dead perhaps some three thousand years, tickled my sense of the ludicrous, but what else was there to do? I began to wonder how insanity can be recognized in its more recondite forms, but I never seriously entertained the idea that Abus was insane. Could anybody have looked at her once and continued to believe in it? I couldn't: she was so utterly reasonable and matter-of-fact on every other subject, and so apologetic withal, both believing in and disbelieving in her own memories. She was uneducated, of course, but she had a good mind: I never met a more normal person in my life than she was.

Ellicot's idea that she was Potiphar's wife kept recurring to my mind. She was not my conception of the sleek Egyptian adulteress in

whom I had been taught, charitably, to believe as part of the "Word of God." And if I were indeed a reincarnation of Joseph, I was aware that one aspect of my virtues had undergone a violent change, for Abus appealed to me as no woman had ever done before and it was due to her remote, cold dignity that we were not lovers at that hour—no moral scruples of mine. She tucked her hand under my arm and I held it in both my own, trying hard to enter into her dream and to see and feel with her with the honest desire to help and sympathize.

Abus recovered command of herself in ten minutes or so and I offered to take her back to the ship. No, indeed, she wanted to see the pictures all painted by hand that were in another part of the building, if there were no more relics of Egypt to be seen. She was quite well, in blooming health, she would not be foolish again, nothing was the matter. Perhaps it was the heat. She took off her sunbonnet and we walked upstairs to see the picture collection.

Supposing that her taste in pictures would be of the simplest, I called her attention to Frank Dicksee's canvas which hung on the staircase. It was a picture which had a great success at the Royal Academy in the year it appeared and was entitled, "Seated One Day at the Organ." I

suppose it needs no further explanation. It represents a young woman seated at an organ with a young man bending over her with Royal Academy oozing from him at every pore. There is an effect of sunlight streaming in through some inexpensive stained-glass windows, which was considered highly original and wonderful in its day. The picture contains all the elements I despise in painting, from its "pure" sense appeal to the paltry light effect, but it is undeniably good of its kind. I urged her to notice it, thinking that to her it would probably be a revelation of beauty.

"It is beautiful," she said. "Yes, I suppose that is a very beautiful picture, but I do not care for it. For me, I prefer that old man's head . . . that for me is beautiful: I cannot tell why it is so beautiful, for he is only a simple old man and not very good-looking . . . why is that?"

She had found a Rembrandt, not a real one of course, in Perth, but one of the admirable reproductions, almost exactly the size of the original and, at a distance, indistinguishable from the real thing. There were a good many of these in the gallery and they were a welcome sight after many weeks in the steerage. Abus liked the Watteaux and the Paters, but preferred a little

Velasquez princess to either. She made few direct comments for fear of appearing to slight my possible taste, which she assumed must be different from her own. When pointedly invited to express an opinion she did so, and when she did it was always interesting and more than remarkable from her, seeing that she had never seen anything of the kind in her life before. There was a roomful of modern pictures, for the most part very tiresome, but I stopped behind while she preceded me to gloat over the tiniest picture there, a gem by J. W. Morice, the Canadian. We were in the last room which leads one out again onto the gallery where the Old Masters are hung. Abus, enjoying herself thoroughly, had just disappeared round the corner and when I caught up with her she was lost in genuine admiration of a picture before which so much admiration is feigned.

"For me that is the most beautiful of all," she said. "It is so beautiful that it speaks to me. I should like to have that one for my own. It is the most beautiful of all . . . for me," she added shyly. "I dare say I should not admire it if I knew more about it as you do!"

It was the Mona Lisa who had claimed another victim for her amazing smile. It had been an amazing afternoon. The excitement

of it had exhausted me somewhat and the heat was dry and dreadful. When we came out of the museum there was not a cab or conveyance of any kind to be seen, so we were obliged to walk. I meant to find some place where we could have tea before going back to the ship for, although our sailing had been put off from 3 P.M. until 7 P.M., I knew very well that Abus would insist on going back to the ship before dark. I had tried to persuade her to dine with me, but that she absolutely refused.

She was very white and shaken by all the new and wonderful things she had seen. She took my arm now and walked beside me without reserve, and without thinking of the proprieties, for which I was profoundly thankful. She hardly spoke and presently I felt that all was not well with her. She would not admit that she felt ill, but she became suddenly urgent about getting back to the ship without stopping anywhere for tea.

Fortunately we were near a hotel when the awful thing happened. I would omit the detail of the truth if I could explain satisfactorily how I came to take her into a hotel after promising faithfully that I would not so much as suggest it. Abus had a violent attack of nausea in the public street. I frankly confess that I

didn't know what to do. She was unable to walk, almost unable to stand, and there was nothing in the way of a vehicle that could be hired anywhere. I did the only thing possible before the inevitable crowd could gather, namely, picked her up and carried her bodily into the nearest hotel, telling the clerk she was my wife and that my name was Higgs. It was not a large hotel and there was no elevator. I carried her up to the best room they had vacant and laid her gently on the bed. I ordered ice and brandy and several other things which might be useful and determined to see how she would be after a rest, before calling in a doctor, which, I fancied, would complicate matters in regard to keeping the affair as quiet as possible. I removed her bonnet and undid a few hooks at the back of her neck. She did not seem to have fainted but she would not answer me.

Abus lay straight with her arms at her sides, her thin black dress revealing her delicate little body. She looked like a slender mummy on the white coverlet, and as I propped her head up a little I noticed that she was undergoing some sort of change. It was indescribable. She did not change colour, she was paler than usual, but her mouth was still its flaming red. Her expression changed and slowly her face became

fixed with a strange smile, different somehow from her own, making her look more like Queen Tii than ever. I felt in my bones that she was in a trance and stood looking at her and twisting my fingers in desperation. I had had enough excitement for one day. I knew she would hate to waken and find herself in a hotel with a doctor and a nurse, but I came to the conclusion it was the best thing I could do for her. Get a doctor. Yes . . . and yet I hesitated. I had given a false name downstairs and said she was my wife. Abus would certainly deny that vigorously as soon as her consciousness returned. I cursed myself for a fool, but what good did that do? It had seemed the best thing to do at the moment . . . I was nearly distracted. Supposing she died!

She was so straight and still: I could not see that she breathed. I leaned my head against her breast to listen if I could hear her heart beat. I could; that was all right; she wasn't dead at least. My eyes filled with tears at the thought and though I knew she could not possibly hear me I said: "Abus, my darling . . . I love you and would not harm you for all the world!"

I was startled to see her mouth move and invite me. There could be no harm in kissing

her, even if all her mind was not behind that invitation: surely it was because we were of one flesh and indivisible. We were alone and she would never know . . . yes, of course I should tell her afterwards. Ellicot's words "I know I oughtn't to take her" rang in my mind, but I could not help putting my mouth on hers. I do not know how long we remained like that but I realized soon that I must have a doctor sent for, and at once. I tiptoed toward the door, for there was no bell that I could find. As I did so I heard her speak my name quite distinctly, and her mouth moved as if she were trying to speak.

I went back to her bedside and she began to speak in a low, pleading voice, passionately, but without a trace of change of expression in her face. I could not help thinking of the Oracle of Delphi. I listened spellbound. Was it to me she was speaking? She certainly called me by name. I bent over her, searching for some sign of returning consciousness. While she was speaking like this I could not think of the presence of a provincial Australian doctor who would probably know no more than to order an aperient and a complete rest. That was unthinkable. And Abus was saying love words which at first I had desired to hear her say in

sport and now longed to hear in very earnest, for my whole heart had gone out to her without reserve.

“When my beloved is with me, do I not know? Can I refuse him, even if he refuseth me? Are my eyes for other men, or for jewels or playthings when he is near? What profit hath she in red lips and soft breasts if they be not the fruits of love meet to be offered for him as a banquet? I am his and my life is in him. He is mine and his life is in me. He abased himself and kissed my foot, setting a spark to the base of the pyre which burned the dead life that was mine until that moment. Wine maketh men drunken, aye, even the king, but thine eyes are stronger than wine, Joseph, for with joy almost I abandon the body when they touch mine. Thinkest thou that I can forget that I was held in thy arms for one brief moment? An hundred white doves I gave to Isis for thy kiss in gratitude and a fine ram to Horus. But they abandoned me and gave me no help. Heaven and earth may pass, yet will I love thee.”

Suddenly her brow contracted and her lips pursed as if by pain. Her lips moved inarticulately for several minutes, but at last her words were dimly audible and her features regained their impassivity.

“. . . married! . . . mated . . .
given . . . sold like vessels of pottery
and gold and silk and myrrh and nard: am
I like these, matter for merchandising? And
shall the prostitution of my poor body in dishon-
ourable wedlock seal treaties and give nations
peace, commanding the fate of thousands! That
old man, great in the Council chamber and be-
loved of Pharaoh, have I hardly seen. My talis-
man protects me and he seeth me not when he
looks at me. I, that was the fine flower of my
father's garden, and beloved of the Queen, my
mother, am forgotten among the tiring women
of harlots. Beloved, despise me not . . .
he will never see me and presently I will con-
trive that he thinks me dead. If thou love me
not, I shall die in very truth.

“Then will I come to thee, secretly, and a
slave shall lie in my tomb. He will never know.
He delighteth in Astartoth, the harlot, his chief
concubine, for she procureth for him young vir-
gins, stolen from their mothers in the desert or
brought from over the sea. He is the son of
Ahriman, whom your people call Beel-ze-bub,
a prince of devils.

“Pardon . . . Mercy, my Beloved! I
knew not what I said and I was terrified when

Astartoth saw me and the bed whereon I had wept. She said 'A man hath been here.—Is that not part of his raiment? We shall know to-day if thou shalt see Ra rise to-morrow or not!'

"My Beloved, do not despise me quite . . . she is so big and I am afraid of her. I could say nothing, but I breathed thy name softly to give me comfort, not for her to hear.

"'Ha, the Hebrew slave again, he that seduceth his master's wives and bribes his officers with his favours!' cried Astartoth in her triumph. And it was my tiring maid, the sweet Judith from Ecbatana, whom Astartoth afterward slew with her own hands because she knew how Joseph had scorned her; she it was who accused thee to my Lord when he came in by the door, in trying to save my honour. Yet was my tongue tied by fear and my mouth would make no sound though I tried . . . I tried, Beloved! And that sin of silence will never pass away until . . . until . . ."

Two tears burst from Abus's closed eyes and remained in her lashes. They rolled down her cheek while I was fumbling for my handkerchief.

Abus said no more, and I sat down, bewildered by what I had heard. Ellicot's joke about Abus being Potiphar's wife came back to

me with the authority of a fulfilled prophecy, but it was not to me she was speaking. It must be that the accident of my name had stirred the sediment of that ancient passion in her soul. Her whole manner indicated that she was living through something over again in which I had no part whatever. She was utterly unconscious of my existence. I was not Joseph: that was too preposterous. I must not lose my head. I pinched myself hard to assure myself that the whole fantastic incident was not a dream. And Abus lay silent and still as a picture painted on a wall.

But she could not lie there for ever. I must make up my mind and do something definite and at once. A third-rate Australian hotel could not become the scene of a new *Sleeping Beauty*, translated into the twentieth century, and again the idea of calling for medical assistance presented itself and I recoiled from it with increased apprehension. What if she should begin to talk familiarly of Potiphar and Pharaoh before him! Would he not pronounce her a raving lunatic and have her locked up at once? Perhaps she was. I knew nothing about lunacy, but I had heard that lunatics often seem perfectly natural and responsible on most subjects while on certain others they may be absolutely

abnormal. With myself I could discuss her sanity with great calm and show of justice, knowing very well which side would win, but at the same time I knew that I should, without a pang, wring the neck of any local pill-slinger if he should dare to say anything like the reverse. I would not send for a doctor, not until it was absolutely necessary, until it was very clear she would not come round naturally . . . unless, of course, there were new, alarming symptoms.

Suddenly Abus began to speak again, in a much more animated way, and her face appeared to be somewhat changed. She had more colour and was less like a statue, softer . . . more like her own self.

"Llewellyn, you would not wish me to ask again, and you, Agnes, wash your face and hands and clean your nails: it is near to tea-time."

And she sat up. She was apparently none the worse for her experience; it was superfluous to ask after her health. She was as alert as ever she had been, with no more trace of weakness than was natural to any one after a tiring afternoon.

Her brow clouded as she looked around.

"To where have you brought me, Joseph?" she said, slipping off the bed and walking

straight to the dressing table. "This is a hotel." And she burst into tears. "What for did you break your promise not to bring me in a hotel . . . like a bad woman? What have you done to me that I find myself on your bed in a hotel? Have you . . . ?"

I told her all that had happened until I had laid her on the bed. I couldn't make up my mind to tell her what she had said during her trance, for though she showed it so little, she had been at least semi-unconscious for fully half an hour and there was quite enough excitement for her frail little body in her present situation without confusing her with the vagaries of her subconscious mind.

"And when you laid me here, you did not, after, touch me at all?"

I hesitated because I had kissed her and did not wish to add to my indiscretions by denying it or admitting it. She came close to me and gazed up into my face with fearful disdain.

"If you have . . . harmed me, Joseph, I will kill you, or my husband shall kill you. You shall surely die, if you have done wrong to me."

I blushed hotly with rage as much as shame. I think I came near fainting myself. One part of me adored her and another side of me observed, coolly, "This comes of messing about

with the lower classes: their traditions are not the same as ours and in emergency they speak a language we do not understand." A lady would have glanced at me once and known very well that I could not have been capable of taking advantage of her to . . . to "Kiss her, for example," whispered a distinctly upper-class demon. "There is only one course open for a gentleman," said another. "Walk straight out of the room, in a dignified manner; bow to her slightly from the door and clear out." In a far-off recess of my mind I heard two other demons talking: "Well, why doesn't he . . . ? Anybody'd think he'd never had anything to do with women in his life!"

"I don't understand why he doesn't grab her by the hair," said the other fiend with profound contempt, "and let her know what hotels are for."

"If he doesn't, I'd clear out, if it was me and . . . let her get out of it the best way she could!" A low-class devil, that last.

Strange what baseness will flit through the human mind in a moment of emotion or emergency. No wonder the ancients believed so firmly in the temptation of personal devils; you can almost hear them speak, and feel them pull you to action. Yet did they ever consider

that the voice of God and the voices of devils came from the same quarter, within?

My sense of humour came to the rescue, as it generally does for all of us lucky ones who have it. I saw Abus tempted by another demon, not less abominable than my own. Hers was disguised as a conventional angel, a grotesque figure, something like an artist's lay figure, but alive. Its wings were moulted, its crown of gold awry, its halo bent and its finger and toe nails crooked and in deep mourning from grubbing in the dirt. Across the bosom of its grubby white robes was a cheap satin ribbon upon which, in shiny gilt letters, was written its name "Purity." Therefore I did, after less deliberation than the account of it would suggest, what I knew in my heart Abus wanted me to do. It was not her fault that half the human race has been poisoned with a false attitude of mind with regard to sex. I told her, in her own phraseology, as well as I could, that my heart was too pure to ruin or betray her, and that I would put my right hand into the fire and might I die where I stood if I would wrong or harm her . . . especially when she was asleep! I felt that my protestations were cramped, unreal, and deformed. To my ears they sounded ridiculous and I could hardly keep my face in the proper

mould of severity required for talking on such subjects, but Abus was entirely serious. She was standing before me, looking up eagerly into my face while I made that noble speech. Then she put both her little white hands on her heart and said earnestly:

“I felt here, all the time, that you are good, and I never really believed you would do anything base, but there is something else in me also which made me ask you and make you answer. Forgive me, my real self was sure you had done nothing to me.”

“But I did, Abus, I couldn’t help it, I kissed you . . . because I love you so!”

“And you shall kiss me again, Joseph, now . . . That’s enough . . . I meant only once, Joseph . . . let me go!”





CHAPTER VIII

ABUS went to bed early that evening, and although I felt weary and was preparing to do likewise, a very different evening was before me. The boat usually starts for Adelaide at about 3 P.M. It was fortunate for us that it was delayed, for otherwise Abus and I would have been left behind in Perth. I got her home, however, before dark and in time for supper. I did not see her again afterward.

Ellicot and I walked round the deck after supper and I became aware that all was not well with him. We went to the extreme end of the bow to watch the phosphorescent spray as we cut the water in the moonlight. We went ploughing away from Freemantle at the top speed of eighteen odd knots an hour because we were late and the sight was altogether glorious.

"Our ship," said Ellicot, "is propelled by three screws; the two outer ones are operated by triple expansion reciprocating engines and the one in the middle by a low-pressure turbine. At fifteen knots the engines run at seventy-six

revolutions to the minute but the turbine does two hundred! What I don't understand is why they call it a low-pressure turbine if it runs so much faster than the triple expansion reciprocating affairs."

"And that sort of thing does not usually excite a classical scholar's curiosity unless there is something the matter with him. Suppose you get to the point."

"Pye," he said, squeezing my arm a little as we strolled off again, "you are right, of course, and I will make no bones about it. I've had a damn rotten day. Beppina had a row with me about an hour before we went ashore. I have no idea what the row was about: it was just one of those feminine rows which materialize out of thin air and last just long enough for them to do something else. And then they collect you on the return journey."

"Explain."

"Well . . . fact is . . . I'm mad about Bepp, and she has not been obdurate, not at all. I took my second-class cabin the day after I knew her and it has been worth it—worth all of it. On the other hand, I suspect that Bepp never intended to go ashore with me to-day at all. Anyhow she didn't, and I suspect her of going ashore with Hans, that's the big

German butcher who's generally loafing about the bar . . . and that is not a pleasant thought for a man who prefers to have a cold bath every morning."

"Continue explaining."

"Bepp came back to the ship at about five, not with Hans, but within three minutes of him, and I happen to know that Hans went on duty after that hour. Then she came to me and asked me if I had forgiven her yet and would be nice to her again as I used to be before I was so horrid, and so forth. She knotted her finger in the front of my shirt and said '*Ti voglio bene, sai?*' and was all dimples and poutings and perfectly adorable to look at, but I felt like wringing her blasted little neck! Then, to divert me, she told me that you and Abus had spent the afternoon in the bridal suite of the Hotel Wallaby, somewhere near the museum, and the bell-hop told her you were Mr. Higgs and that your wife had to be put to bed at once because she was ill. She said she knew that you didn't have a doctor and of course she didn't know what you did to her to make her well, but that you obviously did her good because Abus looked so blooming at supper. 'Course, I'm glad you had a nice time and all that, but how did Bepina happen to be cavorting around the Hotel

Wallaby? It is in my mind that she didn't go there to purchase an ice cream nor to peruse the financial papers. And then, somehow . . . though I don't care much about fidelity . . . long-distance fidelity, I did expect that I would be enough for her on this voyage. And then . . . Hans! It does make me feel rather sick; she might have chosen someone else to deceive me with if she was going to! Why do women who look like a Ghirlandajo Madonna always fall for large, meaty, breathy, oily Germans with sandy hair on their knuckles!"

I swallowed my wrath at his interpretation of my afternoon's diversion. Of course it was not his fault that he thought as he did. A week earlier my own vision of the stop at Freemantle had not been very different, and there was time enough to discuss that if ever I decided to do so. For the moment I felt it my duty to comfort Ellicot, though I could not help wishing luck to the worthy Hans, butcher-in-chief to the R. M. S. *Orama*. It seemed to me to be a happy solution of the affair from a practical point of view. We paced the deck together, as we used to walk the Trumpington or Grantchester Road at Cambridge when there were matters of moment to consider. Ellicot talked a great deal of nonsense about interviewing the butcher and in-

terlarded his childish talk with quotations from Ovid and Propertius. Misery makes children of us all.

When he had talked himself out he felt better, by a good deal. Then he sighed and repeated that verse of "The Garden of Proserpine," the eleventh, I think it is, which he knew I loved:

"From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods there be,
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
And even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea."

It has always seemed to me that it is a pity Swinburne did not die with that verse on his lips, but he evidently did not feel it in that way, for it is not even the last verse of the poem.

"Well, Pye, tell me about your deadly sin or miraculous cure at the Hotel Wallaby."

The effort to be facetious was apparent. He was in a serious mood, but trying to lighten the atmosphere for me after subjecting me to a long screed of woe.

"With regard to that, Ethel, the afternoon was not exactly what it may have appeared to

be. Your informant was mistaken, though it is true we spent a portion of the afternoon in the Hotel Wallaby. If I tell you anything about it at all, you must give me your word to keep it to yourself, first, of course, and second, to abstain from treating the matter lightly should you be tempted to do so, for what began as easily as a flirtation with a Cambridge barmaid shows evidence of finishing rather seriously for me. I'm in love . . . no, I love Abus. I love her as, a week ago, I did not believe possible, but she is married and although she is not happy with her husband, I see very little chance of getting her out of his clutches."

"You mean . . . to marry her?" said Ellicot with arched eyebrows.

"I shall never have that luck, but, of course, that is just what I mean."

"Go on—it's your turn to explain."

I told him therefore the outlines of all that had passed between us during the afternoon, to which he listened earnestly and with all the respect of which he was capable; respect for anything was not Ellicot's strong point at this period of his history. It used to be said of him in Cambridge that he "feared not God, neither did he regard man." He was deeply interested to her of her recognizing the priest of Ptah in

the Gallery, but I could feel him rebel intellectually when I told him of what she said in her trance.

"Twelve hundred B. C. did you say? That's just before history begins, really. Greece, for example, didn't exist; Cnossos had been sacked but not utterly destroyed yet: I wonder if the Colossus at Rhodes was standing, if it ever stood at all. . . . You are sure, I suppose, that you never mentioned anything about Potiphar's wife—after I suggested it, I mean—that might have influenced her subconscious mind? Of course she might have got it out of your mind without actual words in some inscrutable way. Nobody knows very much about mental telepathy anyhow, but to my mind a hypothesis like that is just as difficult to believe as the reincarnation dope."

Ellicot agreed with me that it had probably been the accident of my name which had enabled me to draw so much out of her, "but, my hat . . . when it comes to being locked up in a perfectly good bedroom with a girl you are in love with . . . well, I know I couldn't!"

"I was careful to correct myself, if you remember. I said I loved her, not that I was in love with her."

"Well, that's all the same."

"Not at all. There is a very big difference indeed, as you will discover some day, when it happens to you. Being in love is largely a physical condition provoked by a woman who is sympathetic to you, and it refers principally to the physical and animal magnetic side of one's being. I was in love with Abus, and desired her bitterly . . . in a sense I am still . . . do, but love has swamped that to such a degree that for the moment it is in abeyance to something much bigger and better, and I am not wildly interested in it. The greater includes the less though, the greater could never be complete without it any more than, on the physical side, a man can be considered complete with only one lung. Being in love demands a woman who is exciting to the senses, who is probably pretty, whose eyes and hair and flesh happen to appeal to one, whose kiss stimulates us for one purpose and of whom the primitive male tires, and may even have a feeling of repulsion for, when that purpose is fulfilled.

"You mean, when he's . . . yes, I see."

"That is not the whole of love."

"It's a pretty good substitute!"

"Temporarily, yes, as a toy pistol is temporarily a good substitute for a real gun, but it doesn't do the same thing."

“Well, what’s . . . ?”

“Being in love means that something sufficiently incomprehensible has happened inside of oneself which demands another chosen human being . . . and the choice of that one may lead to love, while it is not love, in a true sense at all. It is a part of love, expressed in terms of matter: the real thing is as different from being in love as the personality of a man is different from his lungs or his liver. Nobody knows what it is.”

“What do you think it is?”

“I think . . . I don’t quite know what I think, but I feel that love is something too big to originate in oneself at all. I think of it as power outside ourselves with which we can occasionally come weakly in contact through intense desire for service, self-abnegation, and discipline. We arrive at it first in human life through another being who is able to supply what we lack and who has need of exactly what we can supply. I feel that most of the world-confusion is due to the fact that people cannot understand even as little as this of love. We confuse the issue with simple primitive needs that are on the same level with eating and breathing—necessary indeed, but only as a means to an end. I feel that a complete love be-

tween a man and a woman is the first step in the direction of cosmic consciousness. What we call public morality is the well-meant result of this confusion, due to misunderstanding all this: it is not only a vague attempt to regulate society in regard to the process of reproduction and the protection of private property, which is all it effectually is, but a blind desire toward unity with the Divine. That is why it is different in every age and quite different among different races. Perhaps I am incoherent, but I dare say you get my drift."

"Drift . . . driftwood. . . . All of us are . . ." said Ellicot, thoughtfully.

"'Alone, alone, all, all alone, alone on a wide, wide sea!' Perhaps that's a reason why one ought not to 'Sport with Amaryllis in the shade,' lightly . . . not because it's sin, as the Churches think, or because it's dangerous to health, as the doctors warn, or distracting from occupations . . . Work, with a capital letter, the only god we truly serve because he is the only one who answers us . . . but just because it retards . . . reduces one's chance of getting . . . reaching . . ."

"Reaching up to touch God?"

"Yes, that's possible. 'God is Love.' . . . 'God Bless our Home,' over the mantelpiece

. . . that's a reasonable interpretation of something that has always seemed a pretty vague proposition in my mind. I believe you've got hold of something, James. I've seen women myself sometimes . . . women that are perfect peaches and awfully nice, frank, open, without any kind of fence or rampart of unapproachable feminine divinity and that sort of rot, that I've liked awfully and yet I . . . nobody would ever mistake them for the other sort, if you know what I mean. I hate women who appeal to my better nature, obviously, but I suppose that's about the size of it: they don't seem to make any other appeal at all.

"This wasn't meant to be a moral lecture to wean you from your wicked ways, Ethel, but you asked me what I thought. I am perfectly serious about it, too, but I wouldn't like to think that being serious was a matter for common gravity, for a long face and no sense of humour, or prevented one from having a perfectly good party once in a while. The oftener the better, in fact. I'm by no means sure that the serious man who 'sublimates his passions to nobler uses' and denies himself everything shows any signs of being any nobler than lots of others who think a nice girl helps a party quite a lot. It's like the men who are so fond of themselves because

they don't drink and feed up on chocolates and ice cream like an intemperate schoolgirl. They don't die of delirium tremens at sixty, they die of diabetes at forty-five. If the fine work of the world had always been done by the virtuous people alone, there would be a complete case to go to the jury, but since most of the finest work in almost every direction, of which the world is proud, has been done by the roguey-poguey, it isn't surprising that the jury cannot agree.

"At the same time, while the great are often non-moral, promiscuous gratification of the senses isn't the way to be great or the Hall of Fame would be cluttered with human refuse from the movie super to the squalid-minded millionaire."

"Are those the two opposite poles in your mind, James?"

"No, but they are things which are about equal to the same thing, James, and if you were a mathematician you would already suspect the truth about them, that they are . . ."

"Equal to one another, yes, I got that far."

We wandered all over the ship that night. It was the first time I had done so, though Ellicot had found his way into every nook and corner long ago. He knew his way upon every deck

and was greeted with a smile from every sleepy sailor he met. He was known as well to them as to the maids and stewardesses who were apt to blush as well as smile when they met him. That he was "a cure, a regular case and no mistake" was the popular verdict.

At last we found ourselves at the door of the second-class kitchen where I had a friend in the daytime. Properly speaking, he was a friend of Billy's, but I had purchased an interest in me with silver that expressed itself in surreptitious extra pie once in a while. Oddly enough there was still a light in the kitchen though the night was far spent. The hot smell of things peeled and soup stock, delicately flavoured with old rope, tar barrels, and things of the sea never entirely passes away from that part of the ship. The wooden tables, at which the deck hands dine, were still damp from the vigorous rub down with sea water which effaced the stain of every meal, and there were a couple of men at the far end beneath a dim electric light covered with a galvanized wire cage. One was a stout figure in *décolleté* underwear and a square white cap proclaiming him a culinary artist, and the other, in a striped sweater, holding a tin coffee pot in his scarlet hand and leaning heavily on the table with the other, was my friend. As we

approached he wheeled his head without raising his hand from the table. The coffee pot jerked a large brown splash on the deck.

He invited us graciously. "'Ave a drop o' cawfee?"

We assented and prepared to follow him into the kitchen to get cups for ourselves. The cook humped himself forward upon the table with his face in his arms and did not move.

"Thet pore ol' beggar," said our friend Tom, "'e's got it in the neck all right. 'Is Jane gone bad on 'im, an' only been married little more'n a year. 'Ad 'er first baby about two trips ago. More sugar? . . . 'Ere's the bag . . . put it in yer pocket . . . come in 'andy . . . well's I was saying . . . the baby didn't look like 'im much . . . black 'air, and 'e's a bloody blonde. Wife ain't so dark neether. 'E got a letter at Columbo. She put the baby in a Orphan Asylum, pretending it wasn't 'ers, see? And gone orf with a taxicab driver, 'n 'e don't know where she is, nor the baby eether. 'E ain't pleased about it. Cries away like that most o' the time. Funny, ain't it? 'Cos 'e used to knock 'er about quite a bit when 'e was 'ome. And nobody didn't thought 'e cared much about 'er. She says in 'er letter she liked Bob all right, but now she found 'er 'Enery she knows

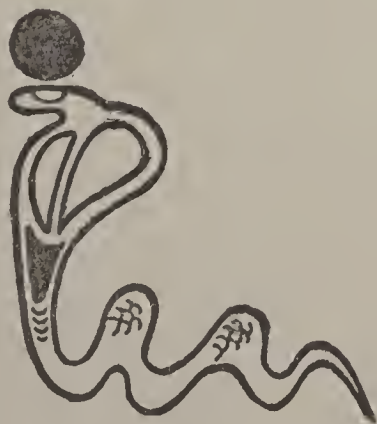
what love is and 'e ain't never raised 'is 'and to 'er all the time they was livin' together in sin. I don't blame 'er one way, but of course, she was 'is wife, so 'e could do wot 'e liked with 'er."

Bob raised his head ponderously, revealing a swollen, tear-soaked countenance.

"An' I always said my prayers at yore knee, Jesus'n all!" he observed sadly.

"He said his prayers at his wife's knee!" asked Ellicot, with doubt in his heart.

"Oh," said Tom, "'e's blowing about 'is mother now 'cause 'e's full o' beer. 'E always blows about 'is mother when 'e's drunk. Funny, ain't it? 'Is mother as 'as bin dead these twenty years, but it's 's wife 'e's full about. I'm sorry for Bob: 'e's got it in the neck . . . 'ere, pal, 'ave . . . 'ave a drop o' cawfee!"





CHAPTER IX

FROM Adelaide to Melbourne is only a day's sail, and from Melbourne to Sydney, not more than two more, and the time passed very quickly. Those who are going ashore have many preparations to make and those who are going on to Brisbane, having no preparations, are in everybody's way. The voyage is really over for the Sydney passengers at Melbourne and things which have got distributed have to be collected: the heavy luggage is in the hold, of course, but soon the hatches are opened and the derrick begins to fish them out of the deep and deposit them on the deck, roped, battered, bulging, or broken. The hand luggage will no longer contain what came out of it. Purchases have been made, of which some are already tired while others are increasingly proud of theirs.

Port Said and Columbo, with their marvels, are very far and the first glimpse of Australian shops betrays that here dwells a young people, up-to-date, and demanding the best, or the best possible imitation of it, in every household requi-

site, but limited to such a degree that it has no conception of what the best may be of anything outside its narrow home circle. The English stranger is shocked at the accent with which the mother tongue is spoken. What he has been wont to consider the hallmark of the uneducated in speech, he finds in the mouth of some of the most highly educated men, and he has great difficulty in adapting his mind to accept it. There is little doubt, too, that however loyal the Australians may be, they cordially dislike the arrival of recruits from their beloved home-shores. The visitors, on the other hand, are very prone to begin at once the reformation of the Australian native from the very first moment, and they do not pursue the good work very long before somebody gives them a black eye, metaphorically or actually.

The average steerage passenger is very glad to get back to a land where his own language is spoken at all and does not suffer from the refinement of accent. They speak as he speaks and he feels more at home than the Australian is willing to let him. I fancy something of the beauty of the slight glimpse they have had of the Orient lingers in the mind of the humblest emigrants. Things were "rummy" enough in those "furrin' parts," and though the simple

soul of them is offended by anything which is different from their own habit and custom, they feel a certain pride at having experienced it. The ever-enduring message of beauty which the East leaves in the mind has made its imprint on their minds, though they are hardly aware of it. The print is faint enough, but sufficiently marked to differentiate them from people at home, if the comparison could be made. They have travelled, and perforce gained something from it, the first step in the subtle process of making a colonial citizen and perhaps the germ of a new species in the human family. For some it has really broadened the mind while for others it may have merely elongated the conversation, which was, God knows, sufficiently attenuated already. But for all it has been a healthful change, a stirring up of the individual selves of all of us from the various routines of our existences at home.

With me and Ellicot the voyage started as an amusing escapade. For him it had gone no farther: he had found a playmate, differing only in kind from others he had found in the past. The first faint signs of an end to his amour had come in the form of suspicion: secretly I felt glad to think that it would probably end, with the luck of a libertine, in nothing. Had it been

a case of a timorous, good young man, tempted into indiscretion for the first time and failing to maintain his highest ideal, there would, I felt, be every likelihood of a suicide, a murder, or, at least, considerable unpleasantness. But he was not that sort of young man. Presently it became more and more evident that his suspicions were fully justified and that the large Teuton butcher, coarse, heavy, pink, and sandy-haired, was going to win out over mere cultivated manners and brilliant intellectuality. Beppina was one of those who prefer quantity to quality and was simple enough to know it. She was beginning to weary of the intellectual demand which Ellicot's presence made upon her, albeit he seemed, to me, to adapt himself so skilfully to her that he became almost her equal when they were together. Hans made no demands, consciously or unconsciously, upon her mental side: he was all animal, just as she was, and as Ellicot observed afterward, whimsically but not without some bitterness, if anybody was going to be ruined by the episode it would be he. "And now she's going to ruin Hans: she really ought to be put in a little bottle, James, and safe under sealing-wax!"

For me the voyage had brought something so different that I seemed to tread a new world,

into which Ellicot could only spy, as through a window. Something in Abus stirred and probed till the foundations of my being were moved. My brain seemed to echo what she had to tell me of her last incarnation, parrot-wise. The memories were hers, not mine, yet I seemed to be able to share them. I could not originate anything, but when she expressed them they seemed to have been on the tip of my tongue. I was certainly in love with her, but she intrigued and exercised me mentally so much that desire for her was swamped by my feverish speculations about her remote past.

I alternated between doubt and faith in her stories, almost hoping that some day a reasonable interpretation of everything would turn up to explain them. On the other hand, I also felt, deep down, that this was the one occasion in a million when no amount of rational interpretation would shake my faith. One thing stuck, like a splinter, in my mind which Ellicot had said in the early days. He said: "You know the Welsh are awful liars. Nobody worse that way unless it is the Manx. All the Celtic peoples regard the truth with a certain modesty; Irish, Welsh, and Manx, especially, think it more decent clothed in decorative parable than just naked. They can't help it. The Irish lie to

make a good story, something you will be pleased to hear. The Welsh invariably lie if it serves their turn in the faintest degree. But the Manx, James, are something special and peculiar among mortals: theirs is a congenital disapproval of repeating accurately anything that has happened. The truth is odious to them. They lie for the sake of lying, even against their own interest!" This, I repeat, stuck in my mind and caused me a little uneasiness every time I thought of it.

As I was ruminating upon this subject, Ellicot happened to come along and plump himself down in the chair I had prepared for Abus. There was a look in his face which warned me not to talk of anything serious. The odd expression in his eyes told me plainly that he would not do anything anybody expected him to do. Not being able to ask him to go away until Abus appeared, at least, I started on the subject of the Manxmen.

"How do you come to know anything about the Isle of Man?" I asked. "I know nothing about it besides the fact that the cats there have no tails, and I thought that was as much as any Englishman knew about the Island."

"I was at school there—King William's College. The pure-bred Manx cats are getting

pretty rare now. They nearly all have a stump of a tail, but the pure-bred ought to have none. It is said they abandoned the use of their caudal appendages through shame, to show that though, being Manx, they must needs be liars, they were at least not tail-bearers also. Shall I recite a noble poem on that subject?"

"James, I thank you, but if you feel like recitation, I would prefer to hear a noble poem about Joseph and Zuleikha, which you promised to tell me about some day."

It slipped out unawares and I thought of course he would refuse, in that mood, and drool on into one of his long spells of nonsense which bore me so terribly, but as happy chance would have it, he took my hint at once. He had nothing to do and the name of the poem started his thought in a congenial direction.

"Shall I tell you how the Sword of the Beauty of Joseph appeared to the most beautiful of all virgins, Zuleikha, in the sheath of a dream?" he said, absently.

"I . . . I wish you would . . ."

"I once thought of starting Persian to be able to read the poem in Jámí's original, but I didn't get far with that idea. I read it in Roger's translation, which I don't happen to like, excellent as I believe it is. Some of it is interest-

ing, but there should be a union to protect poets and poetry against the amateur verse-maker. Why should a man burst into verse because he happens to be able to translate from a foreign language? It is always so much better to get the text explained than put into rhymed and metred form. But some of it is interesting. Listen:

‘Behold the tulip in the time of Spring,
How sweet upon the hills ’tis blossoming,
It splits its flower from underneath a stone,
And in this manner makes its beauty known.
Beauty that loves her body to adorn,
Blushes not long when her disguise be torn,
She will not weep for shackles rent apart;
True Modesty is sweetness of the heart.
Oh, moist fresh tulip from thy bed arise,
How long shall sleep seal up thy golden eyes?
Zuleikha, Zuleikha, from thy bed
Rise up, awake, ’tis morning—lift thy head,
And from the winding-sheet of Yama raise
Thy face, as beautiful as April days.
Turn thou for us the night of dole to morn,
And with a smile now consecrate the Dawn.’

“You said she was fat and forty, I remember, James, I don’t know how you knew it—even the Bible does not say anything about that. She

was the daughter of Taimoüs, King of Africa, according to Jámí, and when she first saw Joseph in a dream she was only seven years old. She had three dreams of seeing him, very lovely dreams, which he describes, and as she grew older she could not think of any one else because Joseph was so beautiful.

‘In beauty none with Joseph could compare,
He that is very perfect do men say,
Is like another Joseph, to this day,
And of all lovers none was like to her;
In passion or in faith. Zuleikha,
From childhood till the age of love she grew,
Filled with her passion as a flower with dew,
Both when she ruled, and in the purple sat,
And when the bread of beggary she ate.
After old age and poverty and pain,
For her the time of youth came back again,
Faith and love’s road she knew and none be-
side,
Born and bred up in it until she died.’

“Doesn’t sound much like your idea of Poti-
phar’s naughty wife, does it?”

“No, that’s admitted, and the verses don’t
sound so out-of-the-way bad to me, either.”

“James, I will not hide the truth from you, I
wrote ’em myself, or rather, I wrote a good deal

of them because I disliked the English translation so much. I wish I could read Rückert's German translation; they say it's superb. There was a part, if I can remember it—I have not thought of it for years—about her childhood and her games and sports . . . she was a Diana . . . how did it go? Something about cow-headed Hathor—Isis as the mother of fertility, and her clothes . . . I'm afraid I've forgotten it . . .

‘Yet she delighted in the folds of Greece,
And vests of Syrian silk, made in one piece,
Sometimes she wore her Chinese broideries,
Spangled with birds and princes and strange
trees.

Or clothed in robes of Egypt, oft was she,
Woven by maids exceeding skilfully,
And every day when fresh appeared the sun,
Naught but a new dress ever she put on.
Twice from one vest her head she did not lift,
She was as white and perfect as her shift,
That lucky silken thing alone had grace,
To hold her body in its soft embrace,
And from the kiss of princes she withdrew
Her foot; her skirt alone might love her shoe.
Perfect she was in all, except, I ween,
That she had never loved, nor had she been

Clasped to a lover's heart, but sported all
The day, and never thought of love at all.'

"Or words to that effect. I can't remember it . . . and it's a crime to spoil it. At the same time, it is a long poem and I dare say you would not thank me for reciting a couple of thousand lines, even if I could."

Just then I caught a glimpse of Abus coming upstairs from the women's dining room. The evening was before us and Ellicot, calm and restful again, showed no inclination to move. I waved to her to attract her attention and a bright idea struck me. Could I persuade Ellicot to tell us both the story of Joseph and Zuleikha, and could I induce Abus to listen to it also? I told her that I wanted her to come over and sit with us, which she did rather reluctantly, for she did not like Ellicot and would make no pretence that she did.

It was a joy to listen to Ellicot on such occasions as these. He had a unique gift for making anything alive in which he took delight himself. I remember very well how he spoilt "Peter Pan" for me by telling me the story of the play in advance. He had seen it half a dozen times and seemed to know a great deal of it by heart. He loved it and he acted and de-

scribed and commented on it all together and made such a divine illusion that I was rather disappointed when I saw the play a few weeks later. I knew he could make the story of Joseph and Zuleikha just as living as Peter Pan and I was anxious to see if it would strike any chords of memory in Abus.

Ellicot told us the story in words of two syllables which Abus could understand, explaining, unobviously, anything he thought she might not follow. He contrived to make us feel, without florid description, that there never lived anything more delicate and beautiful than Zuleikha, and that Joseph was no less. He described the three dreams in which Zuleikha saw Joseph and developed the passion of her life, one worthy to be set with that of Abelard and Héloïse, or Aucassin and Nicolette. He told her how despair changed to triumph when, in the third dream, Joseph told her that he was Wazir of Egypt. Abus's eyes began to stare with astonishment at his manner of telling his story; it was plain she had never heard anything like it before. I gazed at her and listened to Ellicot, whose golden voice took up the burden of the tale.

“When Zuleikha heard this, the rose bloomed again in her cheeks and for very joy she dressed

herself in the colours of sunrise and played with her silver-bodied friends in the Palace courtyard, with renewed zest, for who could refuse her, even unseen, at the request of the King, her father? And King Taimoüs made enquiries whether the great Wazir of Egypt were willing to accept his daughter who had dreamed a dream. Zuleikha had no doubt of the answer, for she knew now that Joseph loved her as dearly as she loved him. Had she not clearly read it in his eyes; the dream could have no unfavourable meaning since it made her heart so glad. All night long she and her brother, or half brother, Cophreth, insisted that none of their play-friends should go to their homes for sleep on such a night. They danced all night to the sound of shawms and psaltery and all manner of music."

"But if her brother was a priest, he should not have danced all the night with girls, even if they were his sister's friends," said Abus.

Ellicot shot a swift glance at me, for he had not mentioned anything about Zuleikha's brother being a priest; but he remembered the incident I had related of the museum at Perth.

"He was too young to be a priest at this time, Mrs. Dunbagh. You know, Zuleikha was only about fourteen and her brother may have been

younger still. Girls grow up and are married in the East to this day at an age when we should think them little more than children. Possibly her brother became a priest afterward, when he grew up. I do not know.

“Very soon the message came back from the Wazir of Egypt, saying that he would accept Zuleikha with honour. Pa-tu-pa-ra was his name, which means the ‘Gift of the Sun.’ He was a very great man, second only to Pharaoh himself. He was Chief of the Eunuchs, Chief of the Executioners, who were Pharaoh’s royal bodyguard. The name of the King, or Pharaoh, of Egypt at this time, about three thousand years ago was Amenophis III.

“Perhaps King Taimoüs did not really know so very much about Pa-tu-pa-ra (which is the Egyptian form of Potiphar, whose name Elliot was careful not to mention), but he knew he was the richest and most powerful prince in the world with whom his daughter had miraculously fallen in love, and in those days no one would have doubted that a dream such as Zuleikha had must be a command from God. It must have seemed like a fairy tale to him, for he was probably not a very important king compared with Pharaoh, who was the son. . . . (He was the fourteenth son, James. Margaret Sar .

ger missed her Egyptian incarnation!) He was the father of the great Akhnaton—the first humanitarian-idealist in the history of the world. (“Wasn’t that the eighteenth dynasty, or was it the nineteenth, James?”) Egypt, in those days, meant practically all the world to those who lived nearer to it than to Babylon. It was hard for people to realize that there were any other great countries in the world then, because the distances were so great to people who were obliged to travel on foot, on horses, or on camels.

“So Zuleikha was prepared for her marriage journey. Hundreds of horses and camels were loaded with all the wealth that could be obtained from King Taimoüs’s country. Gold, ivory, carpets, and frankincense, rare sweetmeats made in the King’s kitchen from the finest fruits, and orange flowers, dates, wine, carvings, and vessels of gold containing precious ointments, everything that a princess could have was showered upon her by her father, and she rode in a closed litter, borne on the shoulders of slaves who were themselves part of her dowry. Most probably many of her girl friends were sent with her, besides a hundred of the most beautiful girl slaves whose duty it was to wait upon the perfect princess. Slowly they made

their way to Egypt where another equipage, not unlike hers, met them by the way and escorted them to the house of Pa-tu-pa-ra, probably a gorgeous country house on the outskirts of Thebes."

"Yes," said Abus, gazing at Ellicot in undisguised wonder. To my imagination it seemed that she was not merely making an interested assent but that she was ratifying the truth of his statements. Never before had Ellicot had such a listener. He quoted snatches of poetry from all ages which might seem to be part of his narrative or descriptive and decorative. I could see that his deep sympathetic voice was not without its own appeal to Abus and I understood, somewhat jealously, that a voice like that must go far to make him irresistible in his love-pleadings. It must be wonderful in the pulpit. Abus trembled a little at intervals, at times turning to me as if to say something which invariably died on her lips for fear of interrupting the wonderful tale. She seemed to ask my help, perhaps protection from the gentle story which was eating into her very heart itself. The spell upon me was hardly less. The outline that I remember is a faint echo and indication of what Ellicot could do: he knew his own power so well. He never made a mistake in

matter or intonation; it was a perfect work of art and I became helpless and fascinated like a humming-bird before a whip snake. He described the life of a prince in Egypt in such a way that it seemed as if he also had lived in Thebes at the time and was telling of the events of the last few days to a friend who had been away. ("Did you ever read Maspéro?" he asked in an aside, half-smiling wickedly. "I thought you might be recognizing some of this . . . of course I don't mean his great history of Egypt in seven volumes. I haven't read that myself!")

"It was not customary for a bride to see her husband before she was married, though I think he was permitted to have a glimpse of her in a mirror. He was more than satisfied if he did, I make no doubt, but when she peeked out through a cranny in her curtains during the marriage ceremony she fainted away without so much as a cry, and was unconscious until it was nearly over, for the husband she saw was an elderly, fat Egyptian with an artificial red beard tied on with green ribbons, and beneath his coronet she could plainly see that his hair was gray. His face too was painted all over to appear as youthful as possible. It was not the beautiful lover of her dreams at all.

“Joseph was not Wazir of Egypt at this time¹: he was a boy of about sixteen that had just been sold as a slave to a party of Semitic dealers in precious stones who were on their way back to their homes, somewhere near Damascus, after a profitable season touring the provinces in Lower Egypt. Perhaps Mr. Pyecote could tell you more about that part than I can: his name’s Joseph!”

Abus turned expectantly and without any suspicion that Ellicot was joking. To her it was all real. I could not disabuse her at once, for it would not only have spoiled her pleasure but probably stopped Ellicot altogether. I saw that he, too, was taking a keen delight in making his tale as interesting as possible.

“The traders soon discovered that Joseph was no ordinary child. They found that he was the son of a distinguished man, who, if he heard of his son being in their possession, would surely have them all killed first and make enquiries afterward. Joseph was one of twelve brethren, it appeared: it was not good business at this time for a firm of itinerant jewellers to fall foul of twelve prosperous men all at once if it could be avoided. They discussed the question of ransom at great length: they might say they had

¹Nobody is quite sure when he was. Some Egyptologists placing him with Amenophis III and others with Rameses II or Menepthah. There is no Egyptian record of Joseph.

rescued him from desert robbers at great risk to their own caravan, but does a man with twelve grown sons pay ransom easily, or would they be delayed for a week in arguments and then possibly get nothing at all but a beating? It was decided, at last, to get rid of Joseph on the first possible opportunity to a caravan going the other way: that was better than risking anything for a matter so unimportant as a single slave. They had got him cheap, too; they might very well make a handsome profit on him. That they settled the affair thus is sure, because Joseph appeared very soon afterward in the public slave market at Thebes, where he was bought by my Lord Pa-tu-pa-ra as a house servant.

“And so it was there that Zuleikha first saw him, instead of upon the Wazir’s throne. She did not doubt that he must know of her dreams or that he was not just as deeply in love with her as she was with him. She believed in her dreams against all odds. Of course she thought the modesty of his demeanour was due to the fact that he was only a slave while she was one of the greatest ladies in all Egypt. She knew that the first advances must come from her, therefore: it was only a question of time and opportunity. The next part of the story you know, for it is told in the Bible. The Persian story,

however, is somewhat different; at least, it gives one a totally different aspect of the case. It tells how Joseph, not being brave enough to risk all for his love, fled from her and she, angry and disappointed in the lover she had dreamed of for years as a perfect being, snatched at his vest to detain him and tore it; she did not tear it *off*. Joseph, perhaps, had known that his master was not far away: his fears may have been quite justified, for he ran into His Nibs at the door—straight into his arms! Pa-tu-pa-ra caught him and demanded at once what he was doing in the women's apartments with his vest torn half off his back. Joseph may be excused for not having an answer ready. A lie is an abomination unto the Lord, but an ever-ready help in time of trouble, if you can think of a good one: even so, I don't know what he could have said to explain his predicament. Joseph couldn't think of anything plausible so he was marched straight off to prison, pending investigations, where a little child, the daughter of the gaoler, was suddenly taken with what was considered the gift of prophecy. She said:

“‘If the vest of Joseph is torn in front, he is guilty, but if it is torn behind, he is not guilty and Pharaoh will pardon him.’

“And that, of course, is what happened.

There must have been stormy times in high life just about that time, for the Chief Butler and the Chief Baker were sent to prison; Pa-tu-pa-ra himself was soon in trouble and was disgraced. He fell upon evil days, after having been the first citizen in the kingdom. That sort of thing could happen quite easily in a land which was governed by the whim of one man. He could no longer afford to keep his great establishment, with his wives and horses and chariots and innumerable slaves. Probably most of them were sold, but the case of Zuleikha was peculiar; she had committed a sin that was unpardonable by so much as thinking of soiling her fingers with a Hebrew slave. Foreigners, Mrs. Dunbagh, were considered unclean by the Egyptians, and an Egyptian princess was so exalted that there were very few people alive with whom she could with propriety have any human companionship at all. Nobody would buy such a wife, if she were offered for sale; she had made herself an outcast in the eyes of respectable Egyptian society.

“Poor Zuleikha, she was unused to poverty, and the rough life she was now obliged to lead soon wore out her beauty, and worst of all, she became blind; probably not quite blind, since she was afterward cured, but I dare say she de-

veloped a terrible case of ophthalmia, which is always endemic in Egypt. She was clothed in rags and so worn out with suffering that when Joseph next saw her, he could not possibly have recognized her. Through his wisdom in interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners, you remember, Joseph was noticed by Pharaoh, who, no doubt, thought it would be a wonderful thing to have a man who could read the future as the ruler of Egypt. It was nothing to him that the prisoner had tried to seduce the wife of the late Chief of the Eunuchs. So he exalted him as quickly as he had dismissed Pa-tu-pa-ra.

“Joseph was a man of extraordinary ability. He became Wazir of Egypt, the greatest kingdom in the world, when he was little more than a boy. He probably was the only man who ever lived who beat Pitt to be Prime Minister of his country. Pitt was Prime Minister of England at twenty-one, Joseph was nineteen. Joseph, having good reason to know how terrible a thing famine is—it had cost him his liberty and nearly his life—decided that he would prepare Egypt against such an awful event in the future. He was the first man recorded who cornered the wheat market, James, and I suspect that he ought to be the patron saint of trust lawyers; did that ever occur to you?

“At all public functions where Joseph was obliged to be present in his capacity as the first citizen of Egypt, he began to notice a little old woman who was always veiled with black so that he could not see her face. She always stood as near to him as the guards would allow, but of course he paid no attention to her, though he noticed her as a spot of unusual colour in the crowd, the prevailing colours of which were Whites and Yellows. He was now cleansed of the impurity of being a foreigner. Under such circumstances a foreigner became naturalized and took a new name, an Egyptian one of course. Joseph took the name of Zaphnath Paaneah, which means ‘The Nourisher of Pharaoh.’ He was married to the daughter of a Priest of Ra, named Asenath, and a very grand young lady indeed. And by the way, James, the obelisk, which stood in front of that temple, presided over by Joseph’s father-in-law, a temple which had already been standing a thousand years before Joseph’s time, is still standing where it was placed though the temple and the god have long since disappeared. Do you think that means that art outlives even the gods?”

For a moment he began to wander from his history, side-tracked by another fascinating subject for argument. Abus plucked my sleeve

anxiously and said, "Tell him he shall go on . . . about my country!" I took her hand, which she allowed me to hold because her attention was entirely concentrated elsewhere.

"At last Joseph asked who the little old woman was, and they told him she was the disgraced wife of Pa-tu-pa-ra, who had plotted against her husband when he became poor and had him poisoned."

Abus started violently. "It is not true!" she cried passionately. "It is not true!" I saw the light in her eyes which she always got when I held her hand in a particular way. "My Lord Pa-tu-pa-ra tried to . . . to . . . because she was . . . his wife . . . or married . . . and, not only that, he . . . She killed him with her bodkin, because she was for Joseph!"

I was so staggered that I dropped her hand and at once became conscious that she was attracting attention from the other passengers who, though not interested in anything they could overhear from such a conversation, were quickened into the beginnings of a crowd when Abus's little voice swelled to something like a tiny passionate scream against the injustice that was being done to her three thousand years late!

"Wassa matter 'ere?" said the bo'sun, sud-

denly pushing through the gathering crowd, "anybody ill or what?"

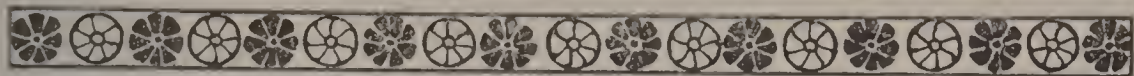
Fortunately the bo'sun was a good friend of mine and I winked at him and put my hand to my pocket. He understood.

"Move along 'ere, all you. . . . Oughter know better'n crowd a lidy. 'F she's ill, she wants a breath o' fresh air, a nif she ain't, you got no call to come a 'eaping of yourselves on top of a private party's chairs like a bunch o' turnips 'anging on the back fence. So get a move on!"

He earned that half-crown, but Abus was very red and shy at having caused so much disturbance. "What did I say?" she asked, "and what did I say it for . . . I've quite forgotten! Oh, Mr. Joseph, I'm so sorry to have interrupted Mr. Ellicot. Oh, why did I do it! . . . He'll never let me listen again."

"Oh, psha, of course he will. He'll go right on in a minute, when the people have gone, won't you, Ethel?"

But I was wrong. Ellicot had disappeared, and ten minutes later I saw him marching round our deck space with Beppina on one arm and Beppina's papa on the other.



CHAPTER X

THOSE last two days with Abus before we reached Sydney will remain a nightmare for me until the end of Time. She obliged me to promise that I would not attempt to follow her nor even to recognize her when once she had left the ship, on account of her husband's violent jealousy. She was sure he would kill her or beat her if he knew she had had a friend on board. "He wants me for him alone," she said.

She repeated, parrot-like, "I love my husband" so many times in those two days that I was nearly distracted by the sound of the words. She was trying hard to dominate herself also, for, though she did not love me well enough to leave her husband for me, she was sufficiently interested to know that she was going to miss me more than she cared to admit, even to herself. I had become part of her life and she looked up to me as a fountain of wisdom, at which she could drink at will.

Yes, assuredly, she would miss me. Never by word of mouth did she indicate that life was

going to be hard for her with her husband in general ways, but perhaps I knew, better than she, how hard it is to exchange the society of the educated for the uncouth, when one's tastes lie in the better direction. She used up most of the first day in packing up for all her little party. The next she spent almost entirely with me. I begged her to come with me and run away from her husband a hundred times, but though I fancied she liked to hear me plead, she would not give in a hairsbreadth or encourage me to think it possible in any event. "If I knew he shall kill me to-morrow, I would go back to him. He is my husband . . . and Theoboama also says it is necessary."

"And who is Theoboama, after all, to direct your physical life quite so closely?" I asked bitterly. "This is a material world and he is a shadow. Surely I am to be considered, too, a little. I also have power to waken memories in you and to touch your heart a little."

"Yes, I will not deny it. I love you very dearly, Joseph. If I were not married, I would marry you, for I think you are a good man and would not beat your wife or treat her unkind. I could have been very happy with you, but it is necessary I am married to my husband."

"But it is necessary I am married to you

. . . and I mean to make you, because I want you and need you so, Abus."

"Joseph, you shall not kiss me now. I have kissed enough. Before I go, perhaps I will kiss you and you will kiss me, once . . . but now, I cannot bear it. I know in my heart that it is right I go back to my husband, yes, that is necessary. That is right, and if I let you kiss me and hold me in your arms . . . Joseph, do not make it hard for me to do what is right. It is hard enough as it is. I want to do right, for your sake, for my sake, and for him, too. You must know I have thought of . . . being with you, too, and I was ashamed at such a thought. For a woman to be with two men . . . it is not possible!

"Last night I was sitting in my bed and Theoboama came to me and put his arms round me. He knew just as if he were my own self what was in my mind and . . . he would not let me be a bad woman. Somehow he was closer to my heart than ever before in all these ten years that he has been coming. I love him dearly, too, but I do not feel any longer that I am wicked to love him. That is right; and I do not know why. I asked him and he smiled and said: 'You commit no sin in loving me, Abus.'

"Joseph, I dare not tell you all he said to me

last night. I dare not believe it myself. I dare not see Theoboama again: it must stop. Oh, I am going mad; that must be it—nobody can be sane and love three men as I love you and Theoboama and my husband . . . I *do* love my husband . . . too! But I don't know how to stop. When I hold your hand everything in my mind becomes more clear, more . . . bright. It is like the colour of the fields, after some rain, richer, more glowing—as when I take off sun-spectacles. All the world is more glorious, but it is too bright for me. I am only a peasant girl . . . now . . . whatever I may have been once, and you are a great gentleman. Perhaps you were a peasant when I was a lady! I only know it is right for me to go back to my husband, and I will go back to him through fire . . . because it is right.”

She was sitting up, very stiff and straight, her hands clasped before her in her lap. Her mouth was absolutely under command and I could see no sign of the struggle which her words indicated must be going on somewhere within her. Her eyes looked twice their size, and suddenly a single tear forced its way out from under her lashes and waited for a second before it dropped. Abus would not acknowl-

edge that tear to herself, but I noticed that the skin was drawn very tightly over her knuckles; they were very white. Her nails were a deep pink also, and rimmed with white at the end, from the tension. I had longed to see passion in Abus's face: I saw it now; not the passion of abandonment but of self-restraint. I could not bear to look at it and turned away, knowing, by that extreme, what the other must be. But she had disarmed me effectually: it was no good bidding for love any more. Principle meant more to her than anything I could offer. I knew very well she was doing what she thought right from the bottom of her soul, beside which I, or anything else, was unimportant.

"Tell me about Theoboama—what he said to you last night, Abus."

"Joseph, I cannot: you will think of me as a bad woman afterward, and I want to remain a little in your heart's memory after I am gone—aye, I want that to live by . . ."

"Tell me, beloved. Once I wanted your body only, not knowing anything about your soul—perhaps not knowing whether I had a soul myself, but now, I want your body and soul both, and I know that one won't do without the other. Yet, if I must choose, I would choose as it must be, to have your soul without your body. You

can tell me anything that tongue can speak without altering my thought of you by the dot of an *i* or the cross of a *t*."

A remote, grateful look came into her eyes. "I also could love like that," she said. "I will tell. Theoboama said we are all being punished for sins we did in our past lives. It was for that I married some dreadful man in Egypt, and Theoboama says that man is the same as my husband now, but he is not so bad . . . he is not bad . . . now. I must be married to him this once more, because I did kill him, and even with such right as I had, it was not right for me to kill him, as I did. But after, I shall never see him again. Of me and you he said very little, but he said we have met before and that I loved you and that you were not worthy of me because fear possessed your heart. In this life, therefore, you shall be obliged to want me now as much as I wanted you then—that is the punishment.

"It is of me that he spoke most of all, but I was not able to understand all the strange things he told me. For it was indeed a strange tale that he told. I could not hear him, what he said at first, because he was speaking not very clear, but every word which I did hear him speak I could read for hours afterward in the

air as if the words were printed in a newspaper. If I try I can still see them, but not so clear as to read them any more."

I reached out to hold her hand in case it might be of assistance to her in remembering. It slowly had its effect, and she said the words were becoming clearer. She was, in fact, seeing them clairvoyantly, and I wrote them down as nearly as I could immediately I had both hands free.

At first there appeared to be some sort of struggle going on within her, as if it were not easy for her to separate herself from the present life to touch again upon what, though also part of herself, was something very remote, as when one is suddenly reminded of events which took place in early childhood. A casual word may bring back a whole condition of life, from which flashes strike one so vividly that one feels everything must suddenly crystallize and give us back the very moment. The atmosphere of the moment is there, but the incidents are disjointed one from another.

The magnetic sympathy between us was certainly a very real thing. By the change in her expression I could see her become more *en rapport* with her former life every minute. During the change her eyelids twitched slightly as

they twitch with every changing thought, but presently her eyes became like those of a statue, still and calm. At first she frowned like a person in great perplexity but at length her brow smoothed out and became very white. I imagined that her eyes slanted more than at ordinary times and that her mouth became more like the chiselled, enigmatical smile of Queen Tii. At other times Abus spoke rather quickly, with a somewhat peculiar staccato but not unmusical way, but when she was possessed by memory, her voice was low, smooth, and deliberate as of one who is completely master of himself.

I gazed at her anxiously while this change was slowly being accomplished in her, and for a while her lips were moved by inaudible words. If there is anything in dual personality, I am very sure that Abus was a marvellous case of it. I am sure she had a totally different outlook on life when she was remembering Egypt from the altitude of a princess than when she was dreaming of possibilities only in her peasant estate. What I have written, purporting to be her words, are of course not accurate, but the substance of what she said is as I have written it and many of the phrases are reproduced verbatim. She was speaking for some time, sev-

eral minutes, before I was able to understand more than a word here and there, but though I may have missed a little, I am very sure that I have added nothing.

I began to hear coherent sentences in what appeared to be a long account or explanation or something, perhaps by Theoboama, but of course Abus could not help me afterward. She herself remembered very little but the outlines of what she had been saying. This is what I wrote down, after a few fragmentary words which I could not piece together into sentences at all:

“But Amenophis lived in the prosperity and peace which his father had made. He loved the works of skilful artificers and every pleasure, but though he had many concubines in the courts of the palace he would not marry a wife to make her Queen over Egypt.

“He went with his huntsmen to hunt lions in a far country. He was separated from his companions and perceived that he was lost.

“He saw a silver lioness with a mane of tawny gold, and, stricken by the fire of her eyes, his senses almost abandoned their envelope.

“Amenophis clutched the bridle of his horse when it leaped up and he fell upon the ground. And when he opened his eyes a Syrian girl of

exquisite beauty, with hands like amber, was bathing his temples with water.

“For a while he lay still regarding her with wonder, and feeling for the first time the passion of love he lifted his arms around her neck and drew her down to him, saying: ‘Beloved, it is for this that Pharaoh was lost, that he should enjoy the delight of capturing a royal lioness with his naked hands. Thou art my Queen and never shall another rule in Egypt while Amenophis lives.

“And Tii answered: ‘Thy handmaid is beneath the feet of my Lord, whoever he may be,’ for she did not believe that he was the King, supposing that to be the imagination of fever.

“Then Amenophis drew her closer unto him and she cried out; but he comforted her, saying: ‘Kings have no need of priests and I myself am the law of Egypt, therefore fear not.’

“And thus he married her and she was called Queen Tii.”

Abus was silent for several minutes—and then she closed her eyes. Then she continued:

“Now there was a priestess in the temple of Ammon-Ra, a fearless and brazen woman who loved Amenophis, and she was a bastard of the Captain of the Royal Guard with a Canaanite slave. And when it was told her that Pharaoh

had made a vow saying that Tii, the Syrian, should be Queen of all Egypt, her heart was filled with anger.

“She made sacrifices to Ammon-Ra, and at last Ammon said that whatever boon she would ask, that he would fulfill. And she, being full of wickedness, said: ‘Give me the heart of the first-born who shall dwell between the thrones.’ And Ammon promised her that boon.

“Three months later Ammon fulfilled his promise which he had made and gave to Zillah the body of a young mouse which had been born between the thrones of Pharaoh and Queen Tii.

“And rage filled the heart of Zillah, that woman of low origin, who by favour of the Captain of the Guard had been hidden in the temple.

“When Amenophis knew how that Zillah had failed in her purpose he laughed aloud, but when his first-born was brought to birth he was afraid, for Zillah was become the concubine of the High Priest of Ammon-Ra and he knew that her anger against his child would lead her to seek to destroy it, by the favour of Ammon and his Chief Priest. And fearing to put her to death on account of the Chief Priest, he substituted the child of a slave for his own, which he conveyed privily by night to the court of Taimoüs, King of Africa, bidding him declare

before all the world that this girl-child was his own.

“And Zillah contrived to slay the child of a slave on the day that it was first brought to the temple of Ammon-Ra, and was content with her revenge.

“But the child of Amenophis and Queen Tii was named Zuleikha and was known as the Princess of Africa. So much did Taimoüs love her that he could not think of her without sighing, for that he knew she was not his own and that at any time Pharaoh might require her of him. And the name which his love gave her was Abus, which means, being interpreted, a sigh.

“Now Amenophis was blinded by his love for Tii and committed sin in leaving his daughter to the care of another, even to Taimoüs, his servant.

“Therefore is Amenophis punished by being condemned to watch over Abus in this incarnation, and lest the punishment should be too sweet, the gods compel him to do so without a complete physical body. Less than nothing is he when he cannot actively serve her and seldom may he manifest himself as a man and be able to take a father’s delight in the beauty of his daughter. And he is called Theo Phoboumai,¹ which

¹τῷ θεῷ φοβοῦμαι

the Alexandrine Greeks call Theoboama, because he was afraid of the god, Ammon-Ra."

"So Theoboama is your father!"

"He is my father."

"And Tii, the most beautiful Queen of Egypt, was your mother . . . my God, what an ancestry! Ellicot was right again. He first pointed out how much like her you are. You have been a great princess in the greatest city of the ancient world, born in one palace and brought up in another, with a thousand servants, with the power of life and death over them and the wealth of the whole world!"

"Get them chairs stacked!"

The words struck like a blow from a whip.

"Bo'sun's orders, miss, very sorry . . . Sydney termorrer . . . we gotta stack the chairs to-night."

We tried to settle ourselves in a dozen places from which we were ignominiously turned out every time. There is no place in the steerage for a princess of Egypt, indeed no room anywhere in a ship for steerage passengers when it is near a port. A hysterical fever attacks the petty officers, and the underlings are cursed and blasphemed upon to drive them to the work they do automatically at every stop. Abominable and filthy language is a tradition on the sea. The

officers almost invariably take the name of the Lord needlessly, if not in vain, every time they open their mouths. It is said to be necessary in dealing with sailors, though why it should be more necessary in dealing with sailors than with stenographers or bank clerks I have never been able to understand. It is a matter of convention only; perhaps a tradition of the time when the locality of the polestar and supplication to the gods were the only knowledge of navigation the captain and his officers possessed. Certain it is that we should raise our eyebrows slightly if the chief cashier of the Bank of England bespoke his clerks in the same terms that many a first officer, who may very well be his own brother, uses to his subordinates, and we should be astonished to hear that the financial world would fall to pieces if he used a milder civility!

And while I think of it, it is curious to note the difference between the swearing on an English and an American ship. English swearing is almost entirely sexual, while the American form is religious. English anger inspires a man and an officer to accuse his men of sexual inversion and illegitimacy, while an American, under equally exasperating circumstances, invokes without ceasing the Second Person of the

Trinity and prophesies the probable estate after death of the man he is addressing.

It was a hectic night and a bleak morning. I slept little that night and woke early to rise and pace the decks to no purpose while the sun rose in the usual tropical violet flush and burst into the pale air. Besides the slight throbbing of the engines, there was hardly any perceptible movement. Then the ship slid through the rough water into the mouth of the harbour and we began the last stretch of our voyage from the Heads to the Circular Quay, a distance of about six miles. I and my fellow passengers stood saying over and over again the meaningless things one says before the actual good-byes begin. I felt very conscious that I should never see any of these people again, and there were very few for whom I entertained any particular desire to do so.

A sensation of sadness came over me, however, when I thought that Billy and one or two of the others would soon be no more than a memory. Billy King made me a real proposal, to travel with me as my body servant, and I have kicked myself a thousand times for letting the chance slip by. He timed his offer ill: my mind was full of other matters at the moment and I am afraid I refused rather curtly. I know he

was hurt by my manner and he avoided me after saying a perfunctory and aggrieved farewell. I could not see him in my life just then, I could not see anybody but Abus, and, of course, Ellicot, but I regretted that Billy and I parted like that. I left him my tea-basket and a Bank of England note hidden in it, in the charge of a steward. I wonder if it ever reached him. So Billy departed with his anæmic brother who was as colourless as a bottle of Pluto water—to work, I believe, in the mines in Tasmania.

Abus vanished into the women's quarters and I did not see her again that night.

Big Frank Forsyth, too, I was sorry to see go out of my life, and the genial baker. . . . When I said good-bye to them I asked for their addresses and said I hoped we should meet again. I think they liked me, those good fellows, as well as I liked them, but there was an insurmountable barrier between us like a wall upon which the shore placed a rim of broken bottles impossible to negotiate. The "Sir" of social distinction came back into their conversation without their noticing it; they fumbled with their hands, nervously, and wiped them on their trousers before shaking hands. Forsyth gazed at the distant horizon. William Stiff cleared his throat to speak for the party. Even

Tom, the ill-tempered, was acquiescent: he was on shore with both feet and the world looked better to him than it had looked for three weeks and more. I had a sneaking suspicion that the moment had been rehearsed or at least somewhat considered in advance.

“If I may speak for my friends,” he said, portentously, “and I think, Sir, I do speak for all of them, I may say we ’ave been proud to know you, almost like friends in a manner of speaking; sleeping next and all that in the same cabin, but we know just the same it’s good-bye and we’re sorry for it. We know you ain’t the same sort as us, and why you came steerage of course we don’t know, nor don’t enquire, but among the people you’re going to be among, we can’t be among, even if we wanted to . . . I mean we’d like to see you again, but we know we won’t so . . . good-bye.”

Ellicot said, gravely, but with an irony that I hoped they didn’t hear as clearly as I did: “Your sentiments and your feelings do you credit, Brother Stiff.”

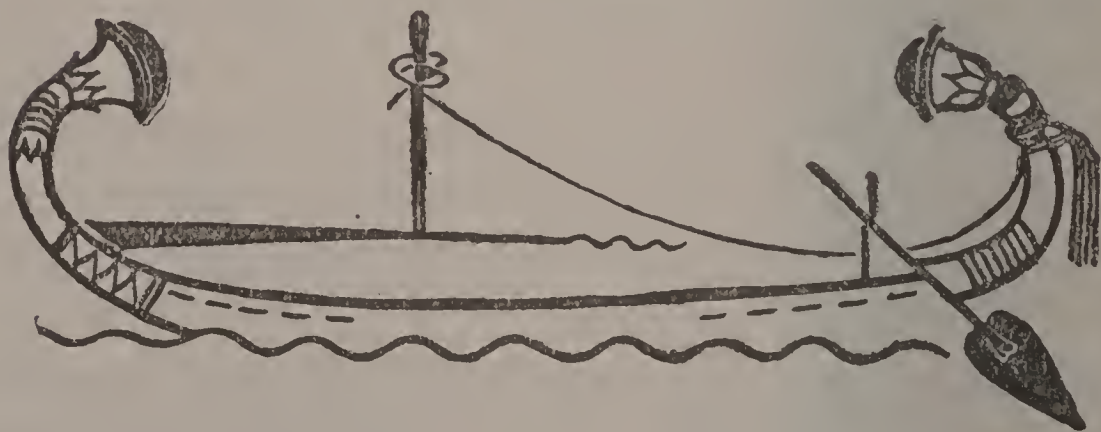
For my part I said good-bye sadly, for I knew they were right and I was truly sorry to see the last of them.

“I think you’ve got an exaggerated idea of us,” I said, “but I do hope you’ll all remember,

if we ever do meet again, that you will pipe up and give us a hail. I shall always be glad to see you, even if I have to shake a king off one arm and a duchess off the other to shake hands with you!"

"And it's a deal more likely to be a policeman," put in Ellicot.

So we all laughed, and parted before the laugh failed us and revealed what was underneath. Good-bye, Stiff, and good-bye, Frank. Never shall I forget Frank Forsyth after that handshake. I thought I should have to go straight to the hospital: it was all I could do not to cry out. My hand ached for hours afterward.





CHAPTER XI

I DID not see Abus leave the ship. It was agreed that we had separated for ever and that I was not to recognize her even if we ever happened to meet. I saw her with her husband and her brother and the children in the Custom House, opening their peculiar peasant luggage for inspection. I tried to avoid them but chance led their steps toward me and she passed without a sign of recognition: she would not even avoid looking at me. We were utter strangers.

“By God, she’s a thoroughbred!” said Ellicot, squeezing my arm, “and I must say, that’s the finest dramatic performance I ever saw from you in my life. If you could do that every time, James, you are wasted off the stage.”

“Her husband doesn’t look so bad at first glance,” I observed, “especially when he smiles, but knowing his reputation, one can easily imagine that it might be true.”

“He’s in a good temper now, but did you see what he did to that chap who picked up one of their portmanteaux by mistake?”

"I didn't see."

"He clapped his hand on the fellow's forearm and gave it a shake that spun the bag right over, and glared at the man like a wild animal!"

I am a biased witness, of course, but I think I never saw a man with a more horrible expression in spite of the fact that he was not physically unattractive. I cursed myself for my promise, but what I could have done if I had not been bound by it, I really don't know.

From the cab which took Ellicot and me to the Hotel Grand-Bristol, I saw the party once more, half an hour later, going into a third-rate "Sea Food" restaurant.

That was an awful day, and the night which succeeded it was worse. Imagination showed me what must be happening to my princess in some loathsome little semi-detached villa in the suburbs of Battery Town. I saw the useless, ugly furniture of the parlour and the gilt gas bracket draped with green muslin against the attentions of flies. And the kitchen, which was to be her daily portion. And the dark chocolate paint at the sides of the narrow stairs slinking along the wall, up to the second floor, the middle of which would be decorated by a new strip of red-and-green imitation Axminster car-

pet, fourteen inches wide. And the bedroom, with its cheap, inflated white water jug squatting in a thick wash hand-basin; useless ornaments, for the washing would be done in a tin basin at the sink somewhere . . . a smell of old sponge . . . because, well, it would make less work. And the bed! . . . And the bed!

If I had been alone in our room, I believe I should have screamed out, but I couldn't make a sound to relieve my feelings. Ellicot read himself to sleep with his pocket Homer and the hours of darkness passed slowly and without sleep for me. I envied him: he seemed to have forgotten Beppina completely. As soon as she was sure that he was leaving the boat at Sydney, she took no further pains to hide her interest in Hans. Ellicot had left one more girl behind him and she was not crying her eyes out about it. There were as good fish in the ship as in the seas outside.

Ellicot's lecherous passions were almost too shallow to be dignified with the importance of sin. Albeit disapproving strongly, I am bound to admit that their effect on him was, for everyday purposes, rather good than otherwise. They did not leave him hard and mean and tarnished spiritually: they were as gilding is to the gold

of true love; the same thing, but so thin that it could only last a very little while.

Hours passed in the awful stillness, broken only occasionally when Ellicot turned in his sleep. A few minutes after two Ellicot turned on the light briskly and came over to me with a pocket handkerchief in his hand to mop my forehead which was wet with perspiration. He took my hand and said, "I'm awfully sorry, James . . . better have a cigarette. I can't sleep either."

"Are you . . . I thought you were asleep. Are you thinking of Bepp?"

"Oh, Bepp . . . no, that is, not much. I can't sleep because you're so beastly stoical. I know you are having a rotten time and I keep waiting to hear you sigh or groan or something—I should . . . but you're . . . you don't let out a peep. . . . Let's talk."

So we talked till about four, after which we slept the sleep of youth until half-past eleven the next day. I got rid of Ellicot as early as I could. I was no fit companion for anybody. I spent a lot of time in the early afternoon writing a "last letter" to Abus, which of course I tore up, and walked the streets the rest of the day until dinner time, occasionally buying something and losing it again at the next place, where I hap-

pened to sit down. It was March and there was bathing at Manly. Ellicot spent the day there with a yellow-haired schoolgirl whom he picked up on the beach. "Nice, but too young to play with," was all he had to say about her, and that she "smelt of daffodils."

"Say, Pye, let's go to Fiji," he remarked at dinner: "there's a boat goes to-morrow as ever is, at midday. It takes about ten days to get there and we can come back if we don't like it."

"Why, but Fiji is all wild, isn't it?" I replied absently. "Sounds rather wild to me."

"I dare say it is, but . . . I feel wild. Don't you feel wild enough for Fiji, James? I believe it would suit us."

We walked down to the docks to look at the ship after dinner. It was too dark to see much and too late to go aboard, but it looked like a ship capable of bearing our weight, so we decided to go. There was nothing else to do. I had already seen all of Australia that I wanted and though I had no hopes that Fiji would look any better to me, I decided to fall in with Ellicot's plan.

Once it was decided, I could not help feeling a thrill of interest in spite of my misery. I had always thought of Australia as being a part of Great Britain, where people who didn't get on

at home, for one reason or another, went or were sent. I found it, indeed, very different from England and, as I have subsequently discovered, far more like America than anything in the Old World. Fiji, on the other hand, I had no mental image of whatever. It was vaguely associated in my mind with palm trees and nakedness and missionary stew. To me it was the land where W. S. Gilbert's Bishop of Rumfifoo might dwell, whose people

“ . . . lived on scalps, served up in rum,
The only sauce they knew.”

I had no conception of what I should need to go to such an outlandish place, and I mentally resolved to buy a tropical helmet, such as I had refused, with some scorn, to purchase in Port Said, though Ellicot had indulged in one. I tried to pull myself together and put the thought of Abus far from me. It was a hard job, but I prepared to face the future with a stiff upper lip.

Six o'clock the next morning saw me up and dressed, and while Ellicot slept soundly, I set out for the docks to see the ship we meant to take at midday. The world was well awake and astir among the network of tram lines that terminate in the vicinity of the Circular Quay.

Market carts crowded with vegetables jogged to and fro, and coffee stalls were doing a lively breakfast trade. I had a cup of coffee and a large triangle of some sort of plain cake at one of them before I made my attack on the yards full of cases and barrels of general merchandise.

I found the ship again without difficulty and went on board in the charge of a white-coated steward and chose our cabins. It wasn't a bad boat at all and I heard that there were very few passengers. The steward told me that Suva was the capital of Fiji and that it was a considerable town about a mile and a half square; that there were hotels and a fine Government House where the British Governor and High Commissioner of the Pacific (then Sir Bickam Sweet-Escott) directed the affairs of the whole group. I also learned that Fiji consisted of two principal islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu which, together, are about as large as Wales . . . it didn't seem to be possible to keep Wales out of the conversation and it gave me a twinge of pain to hear him mention it. There were other islands, too; Taviuni was said to be a beautiful place, but the other islands were all pretty hard to get to unless one could afford to hire a special boat. That was all—and it was enough. I regarded my journey as begun and started for the

ticket office to reserve our passages before I realized that offices do not open at half-past six or even seven in the morning.

There was nothing to do but wander and wait till the desks of the white-collar population were filled. The air was bright and cool and the whole harbour was awake with ferry boats. It seemed strange to think that the up-to-date city of Sydney, with its electricity, steam, and working rabble of civilization, situated upon the finest harbour in the world in which a forest of ships could be lost without difficulty, was part of a gigantic island, the interior of which is practically unknown to this day. Here, where the tram stops, naked hunters were stalking the kangaroo not so very long ago. Where are they now? The aborigines are almost extinct and in the large cities are almost never seen, even the few debased specimens that remain about cities. Out in the bush, within ride of a few hours, strange animals that exist nowhere else on the planet still live and a few natives, drink-sodden, drag out their few remaining days. White Australia is the slogan of the five or six million people who own a continent capable of supporting a hundred million. The "Blacks" or Bushmen have been driven into the remote lands where the white man cannot live. In the

north and northwest there still exist native tribes which do not know that there are white men in Australia at all, where the habits and customs of men who lived twenty thousand years ago are still the rule of life. The Stone Age is there alive, where men live to this day with spear and boomerang, and do not know the more advanced bow and arrow. On the edges of the huge sheep farms, far from the reach of the law, the white man still treats the native as if he were no more than an animal. It is not so long since white men went out to shoot natives as an exciting sport. Side by side with such men are missionaries who go out to teach their rudimentary brethren the subtle opinions of the suburbs of European cities regarding what they are pleased to call salvation, saving those whom God forgot to instruct. In one place there is a station, or was at this time, where the missionaries were living barricaded in their settlement and afraid to come out. For ten years they had tried to begin their instructions, and beyond an occasional spear found, thrown hopefully over the barricades, they had had almost no contact with the vigorous and active heathen around them.

It seemed like an eternity of wandering that I passed among the lumber and barrels and car-

goes waiting to be enshipped or removed. Everybody I met shouted or grunted at me to get out of his way, not without reason. I was an anacronism there. Logically, I should have been in bed, or at best sipping my early tea at the hands of a valet at this hour. I was buffeted about from place to place until I had wandered nearly all over the shipping section of the quay. Lost among the warehouses and stacks of crates, I observed a knot of men standing round something or somebody in the shade of a huge derrick. As I came near I heard several snatches of conversation which intrigued me.

"She's balmy, that's my opinion, balmy on the crumpet," said one fat man in blue overalls with an oil can in his hand. He was going back to the engine house. "Better get 'old o' Mr. Watson, 'e'll see to 'er. Get 'er orf to a nice comfitable lunatic asylum where she belongs."

"Pore woman, slep out, did she? Bitter cold it gets nights, too, for all it's so warm in the day."

"Oo slep out?"

"Little bit of a woman with red 'air, over by the derrick. Can't speak, ain't got no friends, and don't know nothink. Better get 'old o' Mr. Watson, he's in charge. If it was in the evening

now, I'd know what to do for 'er myself; you bet I would!"

"Sam, y' old devil, you get back to your old gas engine," said the other, laughing. "I ain't trusting you so very much in the broad daylight!"

A pang shot through me when I heard she had red hair and I quickened my steps unconsciously in the direction "Sam" indicated with the long nose of his oil can.

There is not much of the missionary and reformer in me. Coming from England and seeing a crowd of dirty men round a woman who bore evidence of having "slep out," it was not naturally my first thought to push myself forward to render assistance. Such a thing suggested a simple case of drink, as it would certainly be in a London slum, but now, it seemed to me that it was my natural duty to interfere. It was my business to see to it that no red-haired woman was in difficulties while I "passed by on the other side." I hated to do it and even now hesitated for a moment. A vision of Abus rose in my mind, like an imperious angel, ordering me to go to the rescue, and I strode over to the gathering with disgust in my heart. The crowd seemed to move and tumble over itself, like flies upon a broken fruit, soiling itself but unwilling

to leave. Fresh spectators were arriving every instant, and those who had seen enough were pushing their way out—heartless, useless, and helpless. Suddenly a glimpse that I caught through a gap in the mob filled me with horror—the woman was so small and so like Abus . . . Was it my fevered imagination that saw everybody with red hair in one memory? No . . . it *was* Abus! . . . it *was* Abus! She was sitting bolt upright on a beam, surrounded by a group of stevedores who were trying to find out who she was and where she came from.

“By your leave, let me pass,” I said, hustling through the crowd.

“Mr. Watson . . .”

“That’s all right, I’ve seen Mr. Watson, I’m a doctor . . . take her right away at once . . . hospital . . . no time to lose . . . all right . . . get a cab.”

My darling, weak and dishevelled by her night out, threw her arms around my neck and burst into tears.

“Nutty all right,” said a bystander. “Thinks the doc’s ’er sweetheart. Pore thing!”

“She’s escaped, that’s what it is.”

“She dunno where she are. Thought she was a tart, I did, painted, and all,”

The cab appeared, and lifting Abus in I told the cabman to drive to St. Mary's Nursing Home, the first thing that came into my head.

"Where's that?" said the cabman.

"Drive . . . drive north, I'll direct you." And so we got away.

We had hardly driven out of the immediate neighbourhood of the docks when the driver said, "If this y'ere nursing 'ome is very far, I'd be obliged if you'd take another cab. My 'orse 'asn't 'ad 'is feed and . . ."

"It is," I cried, "it's a hell of a long way . . . I quite understand. Stop the first taxi."

That problem had settled itself. We got a taxi in a few minutes, and I told the man to drive us to a quiet place where we could have breakfast. Abus sat beside me speechless, her hand in mine, and I was so glad to have got her back again beside me that I could not ask any questions. When she tried to say something I stopped her: "Not now, darling. We'll have something to eat first and then you'll feel better and more able to talk." She was crying silently and I put my arm around her.

After we had fortified ourselves with coffee and bacon and eggs I bought her a hat at a neighbouring store, for her own had fallen into

the mud and been badly trampled on. She managed to tidy herself quite well and I took her to a small hotel (I didn't dare to take her to the Grand-Bristol), where we had our talk in peace. The details of her sufferings during those two days are not to be dwelt on. She had left her husband a few hours after their breakfast in the "Sea Food" establishment. He had had a row with her brother, who had gone off in a rage, leaving them no address, and she had not been able to face the life she divined was in store for her. Her husband had taken their railway tickets out to Battery Town, fifty miles away, and she had lost herself in the crowd intentionally. She knew that he would be looking for her, but she said she would rather die than go back to him now.

"It's nothing he has done . . . yet, but what I know he shall do to me," she said, "and I can't, Joseph, I tried . . . but I can't go back!"

"Of course you can't go back. I was a fool ever to let you slip through my hands, ever to let you go or to promise to leave you alone. Besides,

'Pleasant is this saying of the wise,
Love and the scent of musk, one can't disguise.'

Your husband would have found you out in less than a week. You belong to me and you must come with me. But, has Theoboama not come to you at all?"

"Yes, in the Salvation Army shelter where I stayed the first night, but I could not understand him very well; he only smiled . . . I thought he was coming when all those men found me asleep. I did not mean to sleep there, but I had no more money left . . . and you came instead!"

"That means he is willing to let me look after you. Ellicot and I are going . . . somewhere, by ship, at twelve o'clock, never mind where. I have telephoned Ellicot to take three passages, and you will get out of your husband's reach, for of course all the police are out after you by now."

"The police!" cried Abus in alarm. "I have done no crime—will they put me in prison?"

"I don't know what they will do. I don't know what the law is in this country, but if they catch you, you may be sure you will be sent straight back to your husband."

"I daren't, Joseph . . . they won't make me do that, will they? I can work and make enough to live."

It took me a good hour and a half to persuade

her that she couldn't do that without being found by her husband sooner or later. She was sufficiently conspicuous in any crowd to be difficult to disguise effectually. At last she cried in my arms, worn out with fatigue and very weariness of the spirit, and I took advantage of her physical weakness to make her agree to my proposal.

"You must come with me for a month, and afterward, if you want to come back here, you shall, but I want you to trust me entirely . . . and come."

Abus blushed scarlet. "Do you mean I shall come and pretend to be your wife?"

"No, as my sister, a sister who is in deep mourning because she has lost her husband . . . that is true, Abus, and I hope it is equally true that he has lost you, for you would certainly die in a very little while if you go back to him. You will have a baby every year and sometimes he will lose his temper, as he did yesterday . . . and presently he will become very unhappy with the anxiety of keeping an unhappy wife with too many children in a foreign land where he will not have half the village to help whenever he lifts his hand, as he did in your village in Wales. People have to live for themselves in Australia, and if he gives demonstrations of his astonishing strength, it will very

soon inspire someone to give a demonstration of astonishing skill with a pistol. Did you ever hear of a man in Maesteg carrying a revolver? No, of course not, but you'd be surprised to know how many men outside the cities always carry one here. And don't you think he would be even more suspicious of you if he got you back, after running away once?"

Abus would not argue the point. She understood that very well. She was anxious to be clear upon the one point that really mattered. She felt that she had burned her boats and perhaps that the life before her was as dangerous as the life behind her. "*Brawd mogi yu tagu*," she said to herself, a Welsh proverb that she often used, meaning, "Smothering and choking are brothers." She shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

"Do you promise me I shall be your sister, and you will not try to . . . to . . . ?"

"If I promise, and I do—you can surely trust me now, Abus, seeing that I let you go from me only because I promised!"

"Joseph, I will come with you."

"And ask no questions, not even speak, for the time is short before we start. Promise me? There is a great deal to be done. I have a plan."

"I promise, Joseph."

"A brother may kiss his sister," I said, and I kissed her gently on the cheek. Then I packed her into the taxi and drove to Holden's, that wonderful department store which is said to be the largest in the world, and one of the best. It was a bewildered Abus that I ordered to be clothed in widow's weeds with a long crêpe veil. I told her that she was dumb and could not speak, and that I, her brother, was ordering her an outfit to go to Europe. I intimated that if she saw me ordering anything that was violently distasteful to her, that she was to stop me, but without word of mouth. She had given her word and she kept it religiously. It was like a play. I went from counter to counter, hastily, for there was not too much time, and purchased everything I could think of which a woman ought to have: dresses, shoes, clothes of all kinds, stockings, handkerchiefs, tooth powder and vanishing cream; together with several things, I remember, which Abus had never seen before. She began the discovery of a smart lady's life with a manicure set. All this was packed into a great trunk from the trunk department and sent direct to the ship. I got her a nice little dressing case with tortoise-shell fittings besides, and hurried her away to the hotel Grand-

Bristol, where she now created no more attention than a young widow usually does. If she looked at all like the Abus of the day before, I, at least, could see no resemblance that I thought the police would recognize. I doubt very much if her husband would have recognized her. She was an absolutely different person, and to my eyes very much more like herself. Her vivid colouring did not seem extraordinary now, but only beautiful.

Ellicot accepted the situation without turning a hair.

“All I want to know, James, is she my sister or yours? You’ve got dark hair and she might more easily be mine, with my colouring. And besides, she’d be easier for you to marry, later on, if she were my sister; mind you, I’m not asking for any more relatives, but what do you think? There’s a limit to brotherly affection, you know, and you might forget yourself.” I saw his point at once, and hopefully adopted his amendment.

The boat was punctual. Twelve o’clock saw us steaming up the finest harbour in the world. The sea was a perfect blue and the sky as cloudless as my own horizon at the moment. From the first-class promenade we looked down into the pit where the third-class passengers were

clotted upon the dirty deck in a mess of orange peel and empty biscuit boxes. The tiny yachts, hardly bigger than toys, that are peculiar to Sydney Harbour, skimmed to and fro among the ferry-steamers and the large ocean-going vessels at anchor, and the gulls screamed farewell as we churned up a path of foam on the invisible trail that led to Fiji.





CHAPTER XII

ABUS was listed on the ship's register as Mrs. Arthur Thebes. Passports were not necessary in those happy days, so there was no trouble in taking her on board. She was so shy in her widow's black that every movement and gesture was perfect for a disconsolate widow, and though the other passengers were disturbed by her evident distress of mind and would willingly have heard her story and offered their sympathy, they hesitated to force themselves upon her. Only one old woman made herself offensive—there is always one in every crowd—and Ellicot diverted her inquisitive attention with supreme skill. There were no women on board to whom Ellicot could fancy himself sentimentally attracted, so he amused himself by becoming the perfect old-lady's companion. I had never seen him function in that capacity before, and it was a new revelation of his versatility. He was never without a shawl or some knitting in his hands, and I believe he made elaborate notes of what his feelings and beliefs ought to be to maintain the proper impression

that he had created. He is a past master at it now, of course—it is part of his job—but then it was a new game into which he entered with something like passion. He had the clearest orthodox Protestant views, the most rigid morality, and respect amounting to reverence for what Mrs. Lockwood Beard called “The Proper Thing.”

She had suspicions of a young sugar engineer and his bride who had been married in Sydney and were on their way to the sugar mill at Nausori, on the Rewa River in Fiji. Mrs. Beard, however, had her doubts about their being really married at all. “You can nearly always tell,” she said. She believed this young couple were living “on improper terms” and was resolved to expose them if she could find out the truth of the matter. She meant to “watch” them, and Ellicot averred that if her suspicions were verified, and he had little doubt they would be, it was “perfectly disgusting.” He promised that he, too, would “watch” them, and would take a keen delight in “branding” them both. He believed the man should be “branded” no less than the woman, if he participated in the sin. Mrs. Beard was inclined to think this a rather harsh view to take, though she was obliged to admit the inexorable justice of it. Ellicot was firm

on this point: he considered that they should both be "hounded out of society."

"You've no idea how pure that old woman is, James," he said. "She's a curiosity, and her mind is a confused sink of iniquity. Now that she knows that I'm pure, too, she unburdens her spotted and ring-straked soul to me until I feel that she ought to be poisoned or pole-axed."

"So you are pure, too, this week?"

"I am, James, but I was not always so. I was converted from a life of advanced sin by a clergyman in the suburbs of Bournemouth who touched me lightly on the shoulder just as I was about to drink a glass of beer. He was inspired to tell me that I was going to hell, and, seeing the Light quite suddenly, the fatal glass dropped from my hand and crashed into a thousand pieces upon the floor. Yes, James, I owe my regeneration to the Reverend Milton Pearl, whose dinky name I saw on the back of an envelope in a barber's shop once; queer how a name sticks sometimes! He has meant a great deal to me and Mrs. Lockwood Beard feels that I was a 'brand snatched from the burning.' She is particularly interested in my estate before I was snatched, and would, I fancy, like to hear me give more minute accounts of the burning. I have been too bashful so far. Seriously, James,

she's a mess. Her husband manufactures pianos somewhere in Australia and she can come away only because her ancient mother is watching him at home. It appears he is frail in the things of the flesh, or would be if he got half a chance. She needed a rest and a complete change, her doctor told her, and never was a man righter in his diagnosis on the second count. I suspect him of being in the pay of the husband. If I were married to a woman like that I should beat her with a stick—very hard! Her mind is like a refuse heap, made of the offal of other people's lives.

‘A damnéd dung-heap,
Whereon my spirit like a rooster crows!’

Do you know, she calls living with her husband, ‘the cross we poor women have to bear for our husbands.’ Think of it, James! She's dreadful, but very interesting. I had no idea there were really people like that! She is a gross libertine, beside whom I am virtuous—boiled twenty minutes; a militant puritan so inverted that she can feel conscious of her atrophied senses only through finding out succulent details about those who are ‘living on improper terms’—don't you love the expression? She thinks of evil from morning to night and wallows in her

thought of it: it's never out of her mind; it's like an incubus!

"I am being exceedingly diverted, but after an hour or so of her, and it, I have to go away and wash both my hands and *all* my teeth! That's what perfect purity does for me!"

Ellicot kept Mrs. Beard's attention from Abus at least, and in a few days she began to lose her embarrassment. The comfort of the first-class cabin and the deference shown her by the ship's servants began to break down her reserve. She was more at ease and in her element by the end of the ten days than she had been during the three weeks in the steerage of the *Orama*. I think she was sorry when the trip was over. I, however, was glad. I never felt quite sure that Mrs. Beard would not break from the clutches of the virtuous Ellicot and, in a paroxysm of Purity, denounce us for travelling with a woman to whom neither of us was related. It would have been a plum for her, but she was too busy suspecting the sugar man's bride to pay much attention to Abus, who stayed a good deal in her cabin and was never seen about the deck unattended by one of us. At the same time, a guilty conscience gave me no peace and I never felt sure. It was a relief to me when we were safely moored to the long wooden pier at Suva.

We arrived safely and put up at the hotel, sacred, as far as I can remember, to the memory of St. George. Abus noticed with great interest the short sulu and bare legs of the native waiters who served our dinner.

"It is like Egypt," she said, and though I had never thought of it before, the sulu, or simple cloth worn as a skirt to the knee and twisted outward as one wears a towel at the Turkish baths, was exactly the dress of the common people of ancient Egypt. The Fijians often look astonishingly Egyptian, so much so that one is forcibly reminded of the Egyptian bas-reliefs of men cooking food and poling boats when one sees the Fijians about their daily occupations in the country, especially when silhouetted against the light.

I had not been in Suva two days before the Bishop of Polynesia called, having seen my name among the list of arrivals in the *Fiji News*. He is a charming man whom I used to know long ago in London when he was a vicar of a poor parish in the east of London. Ellicot and Abus went for a long walk at the first glimpse of his gaiters. I was delighted to see him again, but after renewing my acquaintance and talking of old times, it occurred to me that it would be safer to be farther away from bishops and the

English society of Fiji. I thought of Nausori, being the only place in Fiji that I knew the name of, but at length we decided to go to the Exploring Isles, about a hundred and eighty miles from Viti Levu.

We travelled on a large schooner carrying lumber, and every hour of the journey was a pure delight. We passed islands and strange reefs of coral miles from any shore where the green waves curled out of a deep blue water which was almost purple. On one of them we encountered the huge hull of a tramp steamer, the *Paris*, which had then been a landmark and a warning for a dozen years. We also encountered a small boat derelict, alternately sailing and flapping in the wind, for the sheet was lashed. It was being escorted by a shoal of sharks which cut the water, watching it eagerly, but watching it in vain. They had already had all that they were going to have of what it had contained. We hove to and the captain produced a couple of rifles with which we shot seven or eight of the brutes before anybody felt like lowering a boat to go and investigate.

"Them brutes," said the captain, "you can't kill 'em. Fill 'em full o' lead and they wags their tails and swims off, spitting the bullets out of their mouths as they go. I 'ates them."

While the boat we lowered went after the derelict, the native sailors threw out a shark line baited with salt pork. It was taken almost before it touched the water and a fierce, unequal struggle ensued. The shark had no chance to run: he was hooked securely upon a hook eight inches long with a foot of steel chain. Tethered to a belaying pin on the gunwale, he fought and splashed in vain, for the rope was a new one and very strong. He was not a very large shark, barely seven feet long, and he was dragged up on a davit when he showed signs of weakening. The natives lashed his tail and slashed open his belly with cutlasses until they had completely disembowelled the poor beast. Then with a block of wood firmly wedged in his mouth, they respectfully cut the hook from between his five rows of triangular teeth.

"Make 'im swim better, 'e'll feel lighter that way," said the mate.

"He'll do no more swimming," I said.

"You'll see," replied the mate, confidently, "you can't kill 'em, 'e'll swim away and swim for hours before 'e knows 'is insides is gone. 'Ave a bit of belly-ache, I dessay, but that's all. 'E'll die, of course, but 'e'll die o' starvation."

"Poor beast!"

"Well," said the mate in astonishment at the

thought of pitying a shark, "if you're sorry for 'im, you may be sorry for another pore shark what died o' starvation on the coast of Inagua, in the Bahamas. That was a sad story and no mistake. Capt'n 'ad to throw out a whole bar'l of salt pork . . . tipped the whole lot out on the deck first to see if there was any good at the bottom, and we threw the bar'l overboard first. Big shark follering the ship swallowed that bar'l whole, though you mayn't believe it. Pore beast, 'e 'ad no luck . . . swallowed that bar'l wrong way up, bottom side down. An' if you'll believe me, though 'e swallowed all the rotten pork after we thrun it out, 'e got no good of it. Pork all went back into the bar'l and the pore shark died o' starvation. Ef that ain't a hard luck story! Pore shark, I felt sorry for 'im meself. Pore shark, indeed!"

You never know what to believe on shipboard. So many impossible things are actual facts that in time one gets to the point of being able to believe almost anything. I have not been to sea long enough to swallow the last story but, to my horror, I perceived that the mate was apparently not exceeding the truth about the eviscerated shark before us. It wavered on the surface for a few minutes when they dropped him down and then swam off, right side up, in the direction of

the reef. We could see the shadow of him for a long way in the shallows at its edge.

We took the boat up on deck. There was nothing to indicate to whom it had belonged. It was probably a ship's tender from a boat of about our own tonnage and I fancy we were not more than a few hours late because there was a watch found in a seaman's jacket left on board—it was still going. What had induced him to jump overboard to the sharks rather than to die in his boat? We shall never know, but the empty water jar was probably the answer. Men can subsist for days and weeks without food or with incredible substitutes, but the absence of fresh water crazes them so that a quick death among sharks seems an easy way out.

We touched at the island of Moala, which is eighty miles from anywhere, and were sorely tempted to stop there, for it is a beautiful island. It hung in the morning mist like a jewel of jade which hardly rested upon the pale malachite sea. It was a South Sea island of dreams where there is still very little sign of the white man's presence though it boasts a store and a couple of native villages. We hesitated to change our plan though, because of the difficulty of getting away. Schooners come seldom and unless one has a boat, there must one remain, perhaps for

months, until one does arrive. We had taken passages for Lakeba which, after Loma Loma, is the principal town of the Lau group. Abus was delighted with everything and continually commented on the likeness of the canoes and costumes of the Fijians because they recalled Egypt to her mind.

The sea was too rough at Lakeba to negotiate the channel in the reef, which at Lakeba is only ninety feet wide. When we arrived, the rolling breakers, half a mile from shore, formed an unbroken wall of foam between the open sea and the placid, pale water within the lagoon. We finally landed about three miles down the coast in small boats which natives steered miraculously through a network of foam-covered rocks. A man hung over the bow, estimating the depth of the water and giving directions while another sculled at the stern, profited most skilfully by every wave to lift the boat safely round or over each submerged coral head as we encountered it. I freely confess that I was nervous during that half mile of furious excitement which was not allayed by seeing a small sailboat founder on the rocks a couple of hundred yards above us while its three occupants swam ashore. Ellicot, very pale and exaggeratedly facetious, was no less nervous than I, but Abus

moved with the precision of a chess-man and betrayed no sign of fear whatever, though she confessed afterward that she had been frightened almost to death. We were all wet and bedraggled when we arrived at the town of Lakeba.

Lakeba is a town of Chiefs. It is the capital of a kingdom comprising many islands scattered over an area of twenty thousand miles. We were housed at first in the tiny guest house, probably the most elaborate Fijian house now standing. It was built as a love-offering by his people for the Roko Tui Lau: Roko being a British title giving him authority under the Crown, Tui, his native title of distinction, corresponding to King, and Lau (which means also, the East) is the group of islands over which he presides. Well might he be called Alifereti¹ the Great.

Roko Tui Lau was a marvellous figure of a man; tall, well over six feet and perfectly proportioned, dignified as only a man can be whose forbears have had the power of life and death over their neighbours, and who is descended from the gods. His wife, a stout woman who generally wore a long cotton dress, always with a bright flower stuck in her grizzled hair, was also a personage of considerable distinction, one

¹Alfred.

of the last scions of the very greatest house in Fiji. She was the great-granddaughter of Cakobau, the redoubtable chieftain who, claiming kingship over all Fiji, ceded the islands to Britain in the days of Queen Victoria to protect himself from the attack of another giant, Maafu, who had begun the invasion of the Fijian islands with a mighty fleet of war canoes from Tonga, the adjacent group of islands.

The people of Lakeba are not unaccustomed to receiving shipwrecked and near-shipwrecked parties. Any vessel which comes in rough weather has the choice of risking wreck or going away again. When we were recovering from our experience and had succeeded in getting a wash and change of clothes we heard a stampede down to the regular boat landing. The village was assembled to watch the fate of another schooner which was laden with provisions from Suva and in which everybody was more or less interested in consequence. We joined the throng hurriedly. It was astonishing to see the same drama from the stage and the stalls within an hour. The little schooner was dancing up and down like a toy boat in a mill stream. It was clearly out of control and we could descry the despair of the men on board who were equally afraid to jump and swim for it and to stay on

board, for there is a submarine whirlpool under the coral reef at the Lakeba passage which sucks a wreck and all it contains far under the wall of rock, from which nothing is ever recovered.

Suddenly the ship was lifted up on a huge wave. "That's the end," said an old trader, turning to go, but a moment later the ship was floating in calm water and the crew were laughing hysterically in complete safety. The wave had lifted them over the reef and landed them in sufficient water less than a quarter of a mile from the beach, from which canoes set out on all sides to congratulate the visitors on their escape.

We, being very distinguished visitors, were accommodated in the Chief's guest house which stands in his own compound about thirty yards from his own huge house of thatch. Our little house is a *tour de force* of Fijian art. It is built of reeds and thatched with pandanus leaves upon a strong frame of masi and other hardwood trees. It is all bound together with sinnet made from cocoanut fibre, brown and black, which is plaited in intricate patterns and decorated with thousands of tiny white shells, with never a nail or screw. Prominent also in the decoration are numbers of the large white cowry shells that are sacred to the use of Chiefs. Large tappa

curtains of black and white stencilled patterns of native work divided the house into two partitions to give Abus a certain amount of privacy; but privacy is not very well understood in the remoter islands of Fiji, nor, without a special order from Roko Tui Lau, could we have been certain to be free from social calls from the natives at any hour of the day or night, visiting, according to their custom, for the mere pleasure of "sara-sara," or just frank "looking around."

The novelty of every detail of life, the peculiar rustle of the cocoanut trees, the sound of which is not unlike a light rain, and the never-ceasing distant roar of the reef, soon combined to make us forget that there were such places as white men's cities, with trams and hotels, theatres and sweatshops, anywhere at all.

The people of Lau are a golden brown and, due to admixture with Maafu's Polynesians from Tonga, long hair is not uncommon in place of the frizzy bush, cut like a box hedge, which distinguishes the pure-bred Fijian. They are beautiful besides, and it was not to be expected that Ellicot would be able to maintain the virtue of the past fortnight for very long. There was not a white woman besides a missionary's lady, spouse of a third-rate Australian haberdasher whose half-educated intelligence had

yearned to take the Gospel to the poor heathen in the comfort and security of British Fiji. That lady was chaperoned by her worthy face and I was curious to see how long it would be before Ellicot looked kindly upon the allurements of "brown love." The amazing speed with which he was acquiring the language from the little grammar and dictionary he had procured in Suva excited my wonder. I did not succeed with it very well myself; Abus learned it better than I, and she was as gay as a child, as if she had not just passed through as bitter a time as a woman is often required to face.

Ellicot was kind and gentle with her and never once overstepped the limits of brotherly regard, and she had begun to like him, as of course she must. Trouble from that quarter was not to be thought of. Ellicot was a scream with the natives. His unblushing attempt to talk their language delighted them. He would act and gesticulate until they understood what he meant. I relied very much on the Fijian boy we engaged in Suva as interpreter and cook, one Peniasi Paqi Vau, whom we called "Penny," of course.

Long before Ellicot acquired any great fluency in their tongue, the inevitable happened. He came in one evening flushed with the excitement

of another conquest. I saw it in his eyes before I heard him exclaim:

"James, I like these people; I'm never going back to Europe," he said. "They're wonderful!"

"The old story, I suppose: how do you manage it? Why, you can't even talk to her!"

"Oh, we get along," he remarked, gaily paraphrasing a verse of Kipling's:

'Things you learn in love with the white,
'Elps you a lot with the brown.'

And besides, I can talk to her first rate. She likes me."

"James, you're incorrigible!"

"She doesn't know how old she is, but I judge she is about seventeen and the daughter of a bishop—he's Bishop of the Free Church of Tonga!"

"How dark is she?"

"She's not dark at all, she's the colour of honey. She's half Tongan, and my social position is going up. They have white shells as big as your fist all round their house, tied outside on the reed-work: it's the house by the big mango tree, with the bananas behind it—the one raised up on a mound about four feet high."

"The old man hates the Methodist mission-

ary; that's what brought us together, over a bowl of yaqona.¹ The old boy asked me if I was a Methodist and I asserted vehemently that though I had many stains on my character it was virgin white with regard to that. I told him that Chiefs in my country were never Methodists, that it was the religion of the servants, which, when you come to think of it, is about true. That pleased him enormously. I told him he was all right to black the eye of any Methodist he could."

"You said all that in Fijian?"

"Well, not idiomatically, I dare say, but he understood me well enough. Funny thing how these people like poetry. I recited a lot of Swinburne and Virgil to them, and they listened attentively, just as if they understood. I think they did, too, somehow. I think the rhythm of the lines pleased them and that they were impressed at my being able to make so long a speech with the apparent fluency that they admire so much. When I began some of Swinburne's 'Hendecasyllabics' several men began to swing their hands as they do when they sing. They prefer Swinburne to Virgil, James, which is a pity: I wish I could speak Fijian well, and I'm going to . . . when I finished they all

¹Yaqona is the same as Ava or Kava as it is called in various parts of the Pacific.

said: '*Vinaka, vinaka*' . . . and they meant it."

Vinaka means good, thank you, and general approval, for hand-clapping has a special ceremonial significance in Fiji; it is not used for applause.

"I hope you'll keep this new affair as quiet as possible from Abus. There are some things which are hard to explain to the peasant mind."

"I'll keep it quiet enough, but . . . princesses are easier to explain to. And besides, sisters don't interfere with their brothers' affairs. I'm glad we came to Fiji. It'll be all right, you'll see."

As we intended to stay on indefinitely we did not care to impose too long upon the hospitality of our host, for though we were paying for our board and lodging to a certain extent, we probably made a good deal of extra trouble for the household and we thought it would be better, for many reasons, to have a place of our own. We managed to arrange to occupy a fine house which belonged to a local Buli, a sort of mayor of a district. There was to be a great yaqona-drinking and concert-giving for us on the day we left the Tui's house, for which there had been already a good deal of preparation and rehearsal under the bread-fruit trees about two

hundred yards from where we lived. Fijian singing is very beautiful, the men's voices being especially fine: it has an additional virtue to my ears in being all choral singing—they have no soloists. But, for my part, I'm generally glad when anybody stops singing.

How I wish I could record what the beauty of Fiji meant to me. By chance I came upon an old MS. which I wrote on the spot, on the very day of that concert, though I did not know at the time it was to be a concert of honour for us. It was intended to be purely pictorial, mere notes of the colours, and I wrote it sitting on a mound of green grass in the shade of a sweet green orange tree with my back against a low curved cocoanut bole. It has at least the merit of truth to nature:

“The Buli's house, like all Chiefly houses, is raised upon a platform of earth, faced with large stones. It is built of reeds set diagonally, plaited where they are set lightly in the earth which forms a simple ziz-zag pattern around the base. It has the usual three doors, one at the foot of the house for commoners and two near the Chiefly end, one on either side. It is like the others which surround it at a respectful distance, the only difference being that it is

larger, set higher, and better constructed. Nearly all the houses here are round-ended—'hurricane-ended'—in the Tongan fashion, but a few are rectangular like pure Fijian houses.

"Before the door I can count eight or ten varieties of tree without turning my head. The gray-green grass is as close-cut as a rough English lawn, intersected in several directions with narrow foot-paths showing the mauve earth worn to an irregular patch at popular corners. A copper-coloured croton glows against the lower part of a nearly circular mass of mango foliage. A young tree, the top of which seems to have been dipped in varnish stain, is a shrill yellow-green sharply defined against the dark unicolour mass of an older tree behind. This is a characteristic of mango trees; one part of a tree will devote itself to making new leaves while another confines its attention to fruit-bearing. This one has just shed its reddish orange blossoms, and small green buttons have taken their place upon stalks made to allow room for the fruit to swell to about the size of a pear. Beyond are bread-fruit trees, each straggling bough supporting its candelabra of large ten-fingered leaves which enshrine the pointed buds of paler hue, set upright like a virid candle.

“Warm gray roofs glint through the succulent green and films of blue smoke are rising from an oven made in the ground. The stones have been heated in a hole and the food, wrapped in packets of bread-fruit leaves, is being placed upon them, to be covered with earth by a brown man in a loin cloth of vivid emerald green. Three women are seated by some large black cooking pots at the door of their house. They also wear a sulu but longer than the man’s, and another garment, in shape something between a man’s shirt and a kimono. They do not trouble to put their arms through the sleeves. A faded maroon colour, patterned with a darker shade; pale blue cotton is beside it . . . pink-lined feet. One has her face dusted with a glowing yellow: it is rather chic to wear turmeric in Lakeba. I wonder if Abus has noticed it; she has not spoken of it. Turmeric and pearls, azure and black!

“A small child in a scarlet chemise with a garter of green mango leaves on one leg runs past two silver cocoanut boles, themselves splashed with a light red fungus, to meet her sister to whom, in some way or other, a piece of golden russet cloth a tone darker than her lissom body is attached. Another child, in an English dress trimmed with cheap lace and open down

the back, has found the claw of a land crab among the ashes of yesterday's oven. Some of the ash flew up into her eye. The edge of an English dress should remedy the matter. The lace-trimmed abomination is accordingly lifted up, disclosing a golden "tummy." . . .

"A huge black swallow-tailed butterfly floats tantalizingly near. Three naked brown babies and a gray chicken with its feathers brushed the wrong way give chase. Ha! A dead heat for the chicken and the babies; the *bembe* (butterfly) has eluded them.

"A faint rain begins to fall, emphasizing the fragrance of the good earth. A golden rooster pecks indifferently until, with wings outspread, it occurs to him that it would be a good idea to woo one of his silved-speckled wives. He runs very fast in pursuit with his wings touching the ground: friend wife runs, too, but not so fast; she twists her ankle and falls. The etiquette of chicken modesty has been observed.

"From one of the houses, the nearest to the gray rippling sea, a young girl appears in an ample robe of vermilion and hails one of the gilded youths of the village, gilt to the utmost to-day, dressed for the ceremony. He has crimped skirts of dyed black tappa, a large garland round his neck of magenta-dyed grass and

sweet-scented frangipanni flowers. A long trailer of magenta ribbon hangs down his back. His skin glows like a Goujon bronze.

"Comes from the beach another man who joins them. He also is on his way to dress for the ceremony. He wears a blue and white sulu and round his neck a necklace of half-dead banana leaf, green, splashed with lemon cadmium. Silver and mauve are the gleams on his oiled, brown satin back. Laughingly he rehearses a piece of *meke* (song), an apt quotation, pointed with gestures graceful as a snake. Squeals of delight from the girl as she shakes her furry head and peeps over her *tombe*, the long lock of maidenhood, at the other man. He laughs also, to be polite; not because he is amused. He is not at all amused.

"Indian-file beneath the cocoanut trees come a troupe of girls who are coming home from fishing, some wearing, with their sulus, pinafores over one shoulder and under the other. Others wear the sulu alone twisted across their breasts. All are patterned and dappled with flowers or stripes. Bright colours, exquisitely faded, wet, showing every ripple of their amber bodies beneath as they swing along in the sunlit rain. They have been wading for hours with the dripping nets they carry on their shoulders

draped from one to the other. The first is in blood-red and white, the next in mauve and pink; crushed strawberry with a white chemise follows the green of a hedge-sparrow's egg, checkered with faded pink touched with old gold. Gray-headed, short-haired mother brings up the rear, bearing a green basket full of impossible fish: fish of scarlet and turquoise, splashed with gold, with beaks and teeth blue and silver, with sharp noses and others without any faces at all! Tired of pursuing a nondescript dog, one of the brown babies elects to join the procession. Mother has come home: in his eyes one can see an inspired light. He has visions of sugar cane: she has three yards of it in her hand.

“Earlier in the day a man, carrying his ceremonial dress over his shoulder, went round the village announcing the hour of the yaqona-drinking at the Tui's house. Now the village lallis are being beaten, a lively tune on two notes. The hour is at hand.”

We were the guests of honour at the evening entertainment. The yaqona was made, not with the great ceremony for the highest public functions, but with enough for us to realize what a deep influence the ceremonial yaqona-drinking

must have on the native's mind. The hereditary officials in gala dress, with faces blacked to render them supposedly unrecognizable, made and strained the odd aromatic beverage with dignity and beautiful gestures, singing withal the ancient yaqona song, the words of which have now no meaning, lost in immemorial antiquity. We may suppose they correspond to the modern Fijian language as Anglo-Saxon does to English. Roko Tui Lau, their hereditary Chief, is served first by the server, who dances from the huge wooden bowl to where he sits and offers it crouching. He claps his hands solemnly while his Chief drinks. Then Abus was served, almost simultaneously, sitting on a chair in a white silk dress, bolt upright and more like a figure of Osiris than anything human could be imagined to be. Ellicot and I sat on the mat at her feet, native fashion, and after drinking, spun our *bilos* (cocoanut shell cups) on the ground, saying "*Vinaka, vinaka,*" in the approved fashion, while the company murmured "*a maca, maca,*" with great satisfaction. Every moment of our behaviour was noticed as keenly as if we had been at a levee at the Court of St. James's.

The concert was held in the King's own house, a huge barn-like structure about seventy feet

long. The leader of the singing, with a cane tapping the mat before him as the signal to start, led the company, conducting to a certain extent as a European maestro would do. It was superb.

The door was open and the village came. Even children were allowed to come and go freely if they behaved themselves and got in nobody's way. Not far from me, by the door, a small boy lay upon the ground playing with a large moth which he held by its long proboscis. The poor creature afforded him diversion for nearly the whole time of the singing. When it would flutter no more he got up and went out. The chief lady singer had an empty baked-bean can beside her into which she spat thoughtfully from time to time. Occasionally, between songs, a friend would make a long arm across the floor and borrow it . . . the night outside the open doors was a purple mystery enclosed in the dust of stars among the waving fronds of cocoanut.

When the music stopped the distant reef seemed to take up the refrain. The air was redolent of cocoanut oil, sandal-wood, and frangipanni, with which the Fijians love to scent their garlanded bodies and hair. Three taps on the mat. Are they beginning to sing

again, another strange thin melody that seems to connect living man with the ages of the past? No, everybody rises and goes out without a word. The concert is over. *Vinaka*—it was wonderful. *Vinaka, vinaka.*





CHAPTER XIII

FOR several weeks the topic of Abus's memories of Egypt was hardly alluded to. She had no more visitations from Theoboama, and I think we were all disinclined to approach the subject which seemed to be so intimately connected with the *Orama* and our life before Sydney.

I was certainly more deeply in love with Abus every day I lived, but having given my word that I would make no attempt in assault of her marriage vows, my love seemed to be like a blind alley into which I had strayed, with only one outlet—that by which I had come in. Abus had passed through an emotional experience which, despite her apparent gaiety, I feared might prove not without injurious effects upon so delicate a sensibility as hers. My whole attention and behaviour was directed in her interest, as well as I understood it, and I determined to give her the best possible chance for recovery from the troubles she had passed through.

A few weeks in the quiet of Lakeba had made

a great difference. We abstained from all outward expressions of intimacy, but since we really belonged to one another as only perfect mates can, a deep intimacy came into being which had few demonstrable evidences of its existence. It was something which we both felt without words or need for words; something, I imagine, like that which comes about in the luckily married, when the adorable storms of early wedded life are over. It was not easy for me, I know, especially with the Fijian amour of Ellicot and Maopa always before my eyes, for though it was as unobvious as such an affair can be, it was a picture in high relief to my eyes because I knew him so well, though I did not doubt that Abus was entirely ignorant of it.

Ellicot was so thoroughly master of himself—he was designed by nature for intrigue. At its highest this quality manifested itself in him as the most exquisite tact; in its lowest, as the most perfect of poker players. He was utterly content with his golden lady, as he had been with Beppina. Living each day would have been a perfect joy for me also if it had not been for the steady undercurrent of desire which I could not entirely suppress. The lovely theory of “sublimating the sexual energy” is very difficult at three-and-twenty when the object of one’s

love lives in the same house, cooks meals, and directs the household generally as Abus did for us.

Penny was quite a tolerable cook, too, and he could wash clothes like a French laundry: there was nothing in simple domestic accomplishment that he could not and would not do. In the evenings he went off to sing and *vakamololo*—that rhythmic arm and body dance which is so dear to the Fijian heart—for hours. He also, with frangipanni flowers in his hair or a wreath of orange lilies, was a welcome guest in the home of a certain lovely brown lady, perhaps more than one for all I knew. The warm damp atmosphere, scented with new and enticing odours, the wood doves for ever cooing their indescribably inviting, exciting love-notes, man and beast and every bird had each his mate . . . my own sat opposite me at every meal and walked with me beneath the mango trees . . . together, but singly. The whole air seemed to be full of love, not obviously or insistently, but there was a distinct feeling of placid content in physical matters which shone from the faces of everybody but the missionary and his consort. They alone reminded me of the unrest at home in Europe, of the “sin” which is the white man’s special invention and prerogative.

This agony went on day after day; we never spoke of it nor acknowledged it; but we both knew very well, without need of words, that the situation was not one which could last for ever. The next move, however, must come from Abus: I could only supply silent provocation and opportunities. Everything I did in this way she noticed. I know she noticed and I think she knew I knew she noticed, though it was seldom that so much as a sigh escaped her.

A morning came when there was a new light in Abus's eye, a mood that I had not seen before, faintly different from the colour of her usual demeanour, but no less distinguishable to me who lived only to notice the harmony or disharmony of her being. We ate cocoanut, freshly grated, with honey that morning, I remember, and Peniasi surpassed himself with the coffee. I felt that it was a day of importance, something was immanent, hanging over us, which did not concern Ellicot. He felt it, too, and went fishing in his new canoe with Maopa immediately after breakfast. I lit a pipe with the feeling that it would never be finished and in a little while, when Penny had cleared the breakfast table, Abus came and sat on the arm of my chair and stroked my forehead.

"Joseph," she said, "you are good. I have

never known so good a man as you are. To me you are the most perfect man in the world, and . . . I want all this day for mine."

"All of every day is yours, beloved, and you know it. What makes you say that to-day?"

"Something I cannot easily tell you . . . but I want all this day and we shall go somewhere we have never been before."

"I have been thinking of taking you to see the hot water spring which Peniasi told us about; shall we do that?"

Abus clapped her hands. "I remember, and I want to go. Let us go now!"

"We cannot go there without him, because he alone knows the way there. We could never find it in the bush."

"That is the same, so that you are with me and no other, I mean, no other who is white. Penny doesn't matter."

The infinite tact of the Fijian, born of a long inheritance of good manners, made one feel that he would be quite acceptable as a guide. I knew, without a word to him, that if we wished to be alone he would sense it and fade into the bush at a respectful distance before I could mention it. So we set out to see the spring.

The natives are not very fond of going near the hot spring. It is rather uncanny and not

surprising that a simple people should consider that it harboured devils. Peniasi did not mind going, though, for with our protection he felt himself secure, for he said it had been proved over and over again that "Viti magic no good for papalagi, all right below."

We asked him what proof he could show that evil spirits lived there and why it was dangerous for a Fijian to go there alone. He told us that the evil spirits certainly lived there and were more than likely to kill any Fijian they met who crossed their path.

"Do you mean that a spirit is created out of thin air who beats and kills people as they pass by?"

"*Segai, saka.*" No sir, not that. They do not use violence, but they take the form of a beautiful young man or girl, according to the sex of the victim, and may appear anywhere along the road which leads near their domain. Only the other day a man from Naroï had a narrow escape. He met the fiend in the form of a very beautiful girl of a neighbouring village and she asked him for a cigarette as she passed. Fortunately for him, he had no *tovaka* in the knot of his sulu and he could not make her one. So he escaped. When he arrived at the village, after a considerable detour which he made to

avoid any more of the spirits, he found the real maiden beating tappa in the shed at the back of her father's house. That was a lucky chance indeed. If he had happened to have the where-withal, courtesy would have obliged him to give some tobacco to the fiend and the contact established between them would have been enough to do the evil work. He would certainly have died before sundown. Peniasi was very sure the man from Naroï had had an unusual piece of luck. He himself was convinced indeed that he was pretty well protected anyhow from spirits of that kind, seeing that he had been baptized by a white man.

We talked, all three together, until we were well outside the village and past the outlying barns and copra-drying tables. Then Peniasi, who nearly always carried a three-foot cutlass, or cane knife, in his hand, said he would go forward and cut a path when it became necessary "for your Mary." He would keep within sight of us. There wasn't a blade of bush to be cut and the path was excellent, but his innate tact told him that we were coming to the hot spring not only for curiosity. A little farther on, however, the path became overgrown and Penny's cutlass was very useful. After ten minutes' climbing over rocks and through the path

Peniasi cut for us, we reached the shining black limestone rocks, not unlike the slag of which grottoes and ferneries are sometimes made in England. It began its boot-destroying work on us and in places I was obliged almost to carry Abus who, mountaineer though she was by birth, could hardly negotiate the rocks in the footgear she was wearing. I have always envied the natives their bare feet and love to go barefoot myself in the tropics when the road is not too rough, but I did not envy Penny his bare feet that day.

There were no birds to break the silence of the bush, and amid the dark holes from which emerged long, straight intertwined arms of the vau tree and stealthy creepers seeking the light from caverns beneath, even the common blue-tailed bronze lizards began to look uncanny; young dragons perhaps whose sire was watching and waiting in some hot-breathed cave below.

It was there that I saw a large black and yellow swallow-tailed butterfly which is everywhere rare, and one other which I do not remember ever seeing before. The great *bembe* floated past my head so close and slow that I could see the velvet of its thorax and the balancing movements of its dainty black body. It must have been four inches across, I judge, of an exquisite tawny orange with a black border

perhaps a quarter of an inch wide. Peniasi also showed us a large stick insect, about nine inches long, which looked more like a dead twig than the real thing.

When at last he pointed down a deep hole in the rock, the bottom of which contained, apparently, a cupful of water, I was grieved. "Is that all?" I asked, ruefully regarding the wreck of my shoes. "We came to see hot water; I can make that much on my spirit lamp any time!"

Abus peered over my shoulder. "It is either full of water or it is empty," said she. "There is such a well near Maesteg, but of cold water."

"Are you sure there is any water at all, Peniasi?"

"*Io, saka, wai*, all right."

"You must throw a stone in it to make the surface move," said Abus. "Then we shall see."

Still disbelieving that there was more than a puddle of water, I seized a large stone, and with a pontifical gesture consigned it to the pit. There were four feet of invisible water, invisible until the deep-voiced splash disturbed the stillness and made it alive. It is just the right temperature for a real hot bath, but the air is too warm for steam. Now the movement makes the curved surface of the water plain. From

where the uncouth stone struck, the frightened ripples fled to the ends of the cavern. At every edge of their prison, which was several feet below where we stood, they were making frantic efforts to scale the smooth cup-shaped walls. Rarely does anybody come here, and, I suppose, each one throws into the pool incredulous stones and the splash disturbs for one moment the song of its everlasting silence.

On the way home Peniasi left us far behind when he had escorted us through the difficult part of the path. We walked slowly in the direction of home and Abus slipped her hand under my arm. The mosquitoes were beginning to be tiresome and we blessed Fiji for the coconut fibre whisks we carried more as a habit than a necessity, for the mosquitoes and sand flies are troublesome only at intervals. We turned off the road to the beach where there were none and sat down to rest and watch the curling waves of the reef, at this point only a few hundred yards from the shore. Abus sat close, holding my hand. For a while we did not talk. The evening was so beautiful that the only words I could have uttered were forbidden ones, and I sighed.

"I know why you sigh, Joseph," said Abus, "but now I wish you will sigh no more. I wish you will tell me how much you love me . . .

No, Joseph, not with kissing . . . yet . . . Tell me in words, holding me close to you."

"I love you as the sea loves the sand, coming closer every minute, filling every part of it . . ."

"But you told me that the sea goes away every six hours!"

"It cannot be always high tide, but my love would come back as surely as the tide returns and could never be far from you, even a little distance, for more than a few hours, and even then it leaves the sand full of its memory."

"Salt . . . so salt and bitter, Joseph," said Abus, smiling, and then more seriously: "Is love always bitter, like salt . . . not sweet?"

"It is sweet . . . and in a sense it is salt, too. It is the salt of the earth, without which nothing has its finest flavour."

"Go on, tell me all about love. And all about me . . . and you . . . I am so happy; I have never been so happy before."

I suppose I said what lovers have told their ladies from time immemorial, not with the art of Ellicot, but sincerely and passionately. She listened eagerly, looking up into my face with a look in her eyes which I shall never forget. She seemed to be straining to see something very

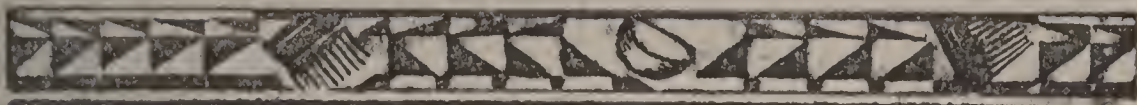
remote, something she was looking for, something she knew was there, a look for which all women's eyes are blessed, though I shall never see it again in this life.

"And now kiss me, Joseph."

"And will you be my wife now? Will you come back to Australia and get a divorce and marry me?"

"I will never have any husband but only you, Joseph. I am all yours. I am your wife already. But to-day we will be . . . as we have always been together. There is something I cannot tell you quite. Theoboama came to me last night and he told it to me. For now, what you wish, and what I wish, too . . . we cannot have that. I don't know how to explain it to you . . . yet. But I know I am your wife. Theoboama said I have been your wife for forty years. Kiss me once more before we go home. I love you, Joseph, as a fish loves the sea."





CHAPTER XIV

THE sun went down in a thin violet haze which is so common in the South Seas and so unusual elsewhere. The sea became like a sheet of iridescent kerosine oil that was in flames where the reef divided the shallows from the unfathomable deep beyond. There was almost no twilight and we walked home slowly, utterly alone beneath a moonlit sky.

Abus was full of surprises. She had more to tell me than she could express in English, mysteries to elucidate, questions to ask, and still I could not fathom what was at the back of her thought. From having the most conventional peasant views on the subject of love and marriage, she had suddenly become a woman with the most modern viewpoint, able, as Huxley said, to be "tolerant toward anything except lying," for whom the form of matrimony was nothing and to which she was quite indifferent.

"It is not possible for a man to live here, alone," she said, "without a wife. I know that you have not done like Mr. Ellicot because of

me, and how I love you for that! But it is not right for you to live so, and I know it is only I that have prevented you. Is it not so? And I do not hate Mr. Ellicot for doing what he does . . . now. I understand a little better some things. It is not the same. And there is something else, too. When a man in my village in Wales went . . . went to women, he was not like Mr. Ellicot. He came back with a look in his eyes that was bad, a look which made all of us women feel ashamed and . . . unclean. It made him also rough and ugly, with children and animals, and in his heart he was ashamed because he knew that he had done wrong. And those who live like that in Wales do not go to church and are coarse and drink too much, and the women are painted on the face and brazen and bold, not like women . . . not human! And they buy clothes that are not modest and they are not clean like they were before. The married ones are not like that, but those who go with men and are not married, they are as I say.

“But Mr. Ellicot, I love him really as a brother now. I know he has gone with many women and that he loves Maopa, to whom he gives so many presents. It is a real love, too, though not like ours. He does not despise her,

and her friends, even her own parents are not ashamed for her, but treat her just the same. He has not the ugly look in his eyes and he treats all women with respect just as if he was . . . quite as he should be. I am sure he does not speak evil of Maopa when she is not there; he loves her and she loves him again. I think, too, that you have loved women like that, Joseph, women whom you did not wish to marry and live with all your life, but I do not mind, because you have never been ugly with them and you have never made them to feel ashamed. It has not made you bad like it makes men at home in Wales."

"Ellicot has tried not to let you know . . ."

"Yes, I know that, too: he would not offend me if he can help it. But of course I know when he has been with Maopa. He is happier and gentler and more kind to me. How kind he is! I think Mr. Ellicot is very good, really; good like a minister, I mean—if only he did not love so many girls. And he talks so clever . . . especially when he has been with Maopa. I think sometimes he is almost so clever as are you!"

"He's a great deal cleverer than I am, Abus. On his own subjects he's just about the cleverest man in England."

"I don't know, but I think now that he is good and what he does is right—for him. But I am quite sure the people I knew in Wales would not do right to do as he does. And I think that if I should give myself to you that you will not despise me or make me ashamed . . . afterward. For me, the body is not so much, but the expression in the eyes is everything; is it not so, Joseph? I have seen people who live their whole lives without ever doing anything wrong . . . like that, who have cruel eyes—like the Methodist missionary . . . though he has a wife, too. But she is not happy, like Maopa is happy. Perhaps he would be better if he did love somebody, even a little. His eyes are all wrong, and he looks at me not right."

I think I had reason to be somewhat bewildered by all this. Abus, who until that moment had never shown any side of her but that of cold reserve, was suddenly become a warm-blooded, passionate little creature, throbbing with life and frankly accepting me as a lover and a husband. All her reserve had broken down, not with the weakness of an abandoned peasant, but deliberately choosing the attitude of mind that is slowly becoming general among the more highly educated and sensitive classes. It was

due to nothing I had said or done: it was entirely her own doing. It seemed to come as the end of a long period of earnest thought, the same quality which, on the subject of heaven and hell, had caused her to leave her Church when she was seventeen or eighteen. She considered herself married to me and never mentioned the subject of her legal husband again. He had ceased to exist. But why did she claim so insistently that she had been married to me for forty years? Why not fifty, or twenty?

She told me, when I asked her, that Theoboama had told her so and that she had known for a long time that it must be true.

“But why forty years?”

“Because Theoboama said so!”

And with that I was obliged to be satisfied. I reflected that with the best kind of spirit communications, even under test condition of the most rigorous kind, there is always a certain amount of material communicated that is utterly worthless or irrelevant—if indeed it is not all worthless. This seemed to me to be just such an occasion: a message had been given, and presuming that it was half true, as in my heart I felt it must be, this added touch of verisimilitude could have no importance, though it had apparently made a great impression on Abus.

I was in no mood to treat the revelations of Theoboama lightly: true or false, Theoboama's pronouncements were of the utmost importance to me, as my whole future gave signs of being dependent on his whim.

"Then you will give yourself to me . . . soon? And without waiting all the weary months of the law's delays until we can be married?"

"We are married . . . already!"

"And you think that is what Theoboama meant when he said we were not to be married, when he said you were not for me in this life? Because we were already married . . . for forty years?"

"No, I do not think he meant that—I wish he did . . . oh, Joseph, how I wish it!"

She buried her head in my coat and cried silently. I took her in my arms and tried to comfort her while she sobbed as if her heart would break, kissing me and crying alternately.

"Are you afraid . . . so afraid to give yourself to me because you feel I might not come up to your highest hope?"

"No, I am afraid of nothing with you . . . you are my king, and I will, I will . . . but not to-night! To-morrow, Joseph, not before to-morrow, ah, I cannot tell . . . I cannot

explain . . . my tongue will not . . .
Joseph . . . Joseph . . . forgive me,
Joseph, it is foolishness to waste so perfect a
day in tears. I have been so happy to-day. I
do not think any woman who ever lived could
have been more happy than I."

And after that, not one more serious word
could I get out of her. She laughed and danced
and chattered and hugged me alternately until
we came within the precincts of the town of
Lakeba. Then we went to the house somewhat
more soberly, and at last, before we retired be-
neath our separate mosquito curtains—for she
insisted that it should be that way—we were
able to have one long good-night, for Ellicot
had not come home yet.

"To-morrow?" I whispered.

"To-morrow I shall be all yours, body and
soul, to do what you like with for ever and
ever . . ."

"Amen . . .!"

"Ammon . . . Good-night now, and give
me the key of the medicine chest. I want some
quinine."

I gave it to her and she helped herself, leav-
ing the key in the box till the morrow. Ellicot
might want it, too, for we all took a few grains
of quinine every other day or so as a preventive

against fever. The box was always kept locked in the daytime though, because the natives adore taking pills, and there were a few things, like formalin, veronal, and certain succulent-looking pink candies labelled "corrosive sublimate" which are not very good for anybody's inside.

So ended the happiest day of my life, which for Abus was not only the happiest, but the last. She appeared to be sleeping late the next morning, and, knowing that she had had a tiring climb through the bush the day before and violent emotional excitement as well, I decided not to let her be disturbed until midday, if necessary. There was not a sound from behind her curtains at breakfast time, though Peniasi made more noise than there was any occasion for and we had to tell him several times to be careful, not to waken her.

Ellicot, as usual, went out to fish with Maopa on the reef. He had become an enthusiast and he brought back all sorts of strange creatures which Peniasi seemed to recognize as human food. Many of them were excellent, too. I waited with a book on my knee which I was too impatient to read, to hear Abus give her first waking halloo, to be told what time it was. It never came.

Suddenly I bethought me of the medicine-

chest key that was missing from my key-ring. I had no anxiety about it, but I went to lock the chest in case Penny might be tempted while he was doing the beds. When I opened the box I noticed absently that the new bottle of quinine had not been opened. I remembered, with a pang of fear, that the last bottle had been emptied the day before. There was a new bottle of tabloids—unbroken seal. I saw something else which took my breath away with the horror of it . . . I rushed to Abus's bed . . .

She had taken veronal . . . by mistake. By mistake? I cannot understand it to this day. The quinine was liquid . . . the veronal was in tabloids.

Abus was dead, with a smile of the most beatific bliss on her face. She was almost cold and had therefore been dead for some hours. The anguish that came upon me beggars description even if I wanted to describe it.

This is the story of Abus, and properly speaking it finishes with her death. But I must pay tribute to Ellicot, for his tact, kindness, and indefatigable energy in doing everything for me and for her. During the hours of my suffering, when I think I was out of my mind, Ellicot told me, afterward, that I had kept repeating over and over again the name of my beloved, and the

question which had so perplexed me on our last evening together. I kept saying, "Forty years . . . forty years . . . forty years!"

It remained with me like an obsession for days and weeks afterward, but it was a long time before I could bring myself to speak of it to Ellicot.

Ellicot made all the arrangements for the burial of Abus. There was an added horror for me, which Ellicot almost succeeded in keeping from me altogether, but a chance word forced it upon me. The Methodist missionary, whom Abus disliked so heartily, whose eyes, in her opinion, were "all wrong," was the only white man representing the Christian religion nearer than Loma Loma or Taviuni, both a considerable journey by sea. He appeared at the house soon after the news was abroad, like a kite from the blue . . . Ellicot drove him away. He became abusive when he was told that Abus would not be buried under the ægis of the Methodist Church. I doubt not she would have preferred to be laid in the earth by her friends with no further ceremony than the dictates of love would suggest, but since that would have seemed disrespectful to her memory in the eyes of the natives, we decided on the only alternative course. She had known and liked Maopa's

father, so we allowed him to officiate at her burial in his own way.

It was a native funeral: we wrapped her sweet body in the finest tappa that could be obtained, every strip of which was first soaked in poison distilled from a native root. The slim white mummy, so like history repeating itself to my eyes, was wrapped in mats and placed in a chest of camphor wood. She was buried therefore by the Tongan Free Church, not far from the hot spring, near the place where we had told each other so many blessed things only one day ago, where she had been so happy. And if I succeeded in attaining to one moment of real prayer, at her grave's side—God knows I tried—it was to express the hope that the smile with which she died might become eternal, until we meet again.

We could not stay in Lakeba, of course, and were fortunate in being able to get a boat to take us direct to Suva. Ellicot suggested Samoa, but for me the beauty of the South Seas was dead. I could not bear the idea of it and longed to get back to some place which would not recall the idyllic, wonderful life we had enjoyed so deeply with Abus. A week later we were on our way to New Zealand, from which one can take a ship straight to San Francisco. I did not go

ashore at any of the few stopping places, in the Cook Islands and at Tahiti. My one idea was to get back to the life of Europe and this seemed to be the most convenient way. We did not speak of Abus for many weeks. I think we were nearing the Golden Gate of San Francisco before we talked of her. It was then that Elliott told me of what I had said in my delirium of the first few hours.

"Forty years!" He exclaimed suddenly when I told him what Abus had said on our walk back from the hot spring. "She told you that she had been married to you for forty years?"

"Yes," I replied. "She said that Theoboama had appeared to her on the day before and had told her that we had been married for that time. Can you throw any light on that? What do you think that can possibly mean?"

"Forty years! Good Heavens, did she say that? Why, of course, don't you remember what I told you in the story of Yusuf and Zuleikha? No, that's so, I never finished the tale, I never finished the tale . . . I remember now, we were interrupted, but I must finish it now. It is really astonishing!

"When Joseph was told that the strange little woman in black who had followed him about for so long was no other than Potiphar's dis-

graced wife, the story tells that he was touched by her devotion and he made fuller enquiries about her. He found out that she had lost all her exquisite beauty through poverty and exposure, and moreover that she was almost blind. He made provision for her at once in a little house from which she could see his palace always. That was her request. The story has always been one of the most popular themes for Persian and Arabian poets and has many variants. Jámí relates that Joseph prayed long and earnestly that her sight should be restored and Allah (Jámí being a Mohammedan) granted his prayer and gave her back both her sight and her beauty. Then the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph and instructed him to marry Zuleikha; nothing was said about his wife, but that of course would have been no objection. So they were married. And here's the point of all this: the story tells expressly that Joseph lived happily with Zuleikha for a period of forty years, after which time he died and she died very soon after him. That is the tale which the Bible does not tell, a tale of enduring love to be reckoned with the best in human tradition, not merely an incident of mean, adulterous seduction. It is based upon legend in the beginning, I suppose, but a legend quite as well founded as

the bulk of our history can offer; it contains a foundation of truth and I see no reason why the details should not be fact also. Even with all the impossibilities common to oriental tales, the yarn rings true in my ears. I believe in them both, and the past few months have done something to me, James, in a way I find it difficult to express. I have changed my views somewhat upon certain matters and I do not think it will prove a passing phase. Somehow I feel that we have touched the fringe of a great mystery, almost a discovery, a great romance certainly, a great . . . something. I cannot explain just what I mean in words, but I feel, in some inscrutable way, that coincidence in this case is a hypothesis too marvellous to be believed in. The explanation is more wonderful than the miracle. In other words, I feel in my bones that Abus was the reincarnation of Zuleikha, beloved of Joseph and wife of Potiphar. It seems to me that I have never thought very seriously about such things before, I've never believed in anything so deeply before, as I believe in this. What do any of us know of anything? We can only use the faculties we possess, and hitherto the faculties I possess have not enabled me to take very seriously the claims of any religion I know anything about. This is something

new; it has taken hold of me in a subconscious way. I have perceived without reasoning and become persuaded against my reason and every inclination. Anything which can do that is undeniable, I think. Isn't that inspiration? I can imagine nothing else that could be. Isn't that what the Christians mean by the 'still small voice?' It has supplied in my mind a logical reason far better than a general prohibition without a tangible and demonstrable reason why. Human relations mean more to me now than ever they did before: I cannot consider them lightly . . . all lives are linked by action and action is eternal with all its results . . . certainly I believe that Abus was Potiphar's wife . . ."

"Then I must be . . .!"

"Well, James, if you believe in her . . ."

THE END



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